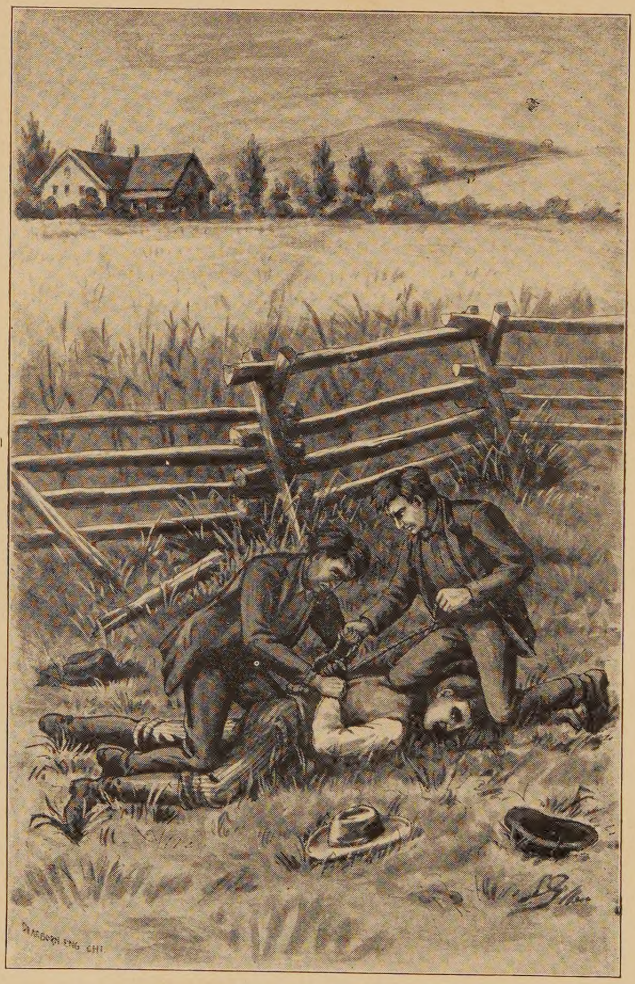
The TREASURE of SOUTH LAKE FARM

By

W. Bert Foster

A Merry Christmas
and A Happy
New Year



BEFORE SANDY COULD RECOVER HIMSELF THEY WERE UPON HIM.

The Treasure of Southlake Farm

OR

A NEW ENGLAND
BOY'S STRUGGLE
FOR FORTUNE

BY

W. Bert Foster,

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THE TREASURE OF SOUTHLAKE FARM.

CHAPTER I.

CONTAINING SOME PRIVATE HISTORY.

The sun rose as brightly as ever on the morning after John McClure was laid away; but the beauty of the day could not dispel the gloom that pervaded the farmhouse at Southlake. Sandy McClure sat on the back stoop of the farmhouse, gazing off across the sloping fields and the still, mist-shrouded lake, doing more serious thinking than he had ever done in his life before.

Should he try to run the farm alone or should he sell out and move to the city with his mother? And *then* what? He knew very well that his chance in the city would be slim indeed. Few employers would want to hire a green country boy when there were so many city boys from whom to choose. The thought of giving up Southlake made him sad, too, and his mother—it would break her heart to leave the old place. "That settles it," he

said aloud, rising from his seat. "Leaving here is out of the question. I'm not afraid of work and I ought to know something about running this farm by now—I've done enough on it, goodness knows. We'll keep Southlake."

"I am glad you have decided to do so," said his mother, as she came to the open door. "If you think yourself capable of managing the farm and making it pay even as well as your father did we shall not want. Do you think you can?"

"I know I can," was the decided reply. "I'll go to Mr. Benton this very day and tell him our decision. And, mother, I think we will be able to pay off the mortgage before many years. The farm is in better condition now than ever before. The papers predict good prices for wood next fall and winter. I will clear out all I can between now and November. The planting is all done, and for a week or two there will not be much to do in the fields, so I'll begin on the wood."

"I think your plan is good, my son. You don't know how I have feared that mortgage ever since the papers were first signed; but your Uncle James thought he was on the verge of a discovery which would yield us thousands in return for the few hundreds we secured from Mr. Benton."

"It's strange whatever became of him, isn't it?" said Sandy, a new train of thought being suggested by his mother's words.

"Yes, your father never forgave himself for being angry with James. He left us without a word, and we never heard from him afterward."

"Mr. Benton is a kind-hearted man, mother," went on Sandy, going back to the subject of the mortgage. "He never was hard with father, and I think he will treat me the same. Anyway, I will see him this afternoon."

Rising, he walked slowly toward the barns, from the rear of which could be obtained a much wider view of the property his father had struggled so many years to keep in his possession. The farm lay some distance outside a thriving New England village, its rocky pastures, noble woodlands, with more tillable fields, covering more than four hundred acres. A beautiful sheet of water—South Lake—some half mile in length and half as broad, was completely surrounded by the estate. This lake was connected with a much larger body, called Benton Pond, by a narrow, oak-shadowed stream, and Southlake was bounded for some distance, both east and west of this stream, by the pond.

Southlake contained many wooded hollows,

rugged slopes, and bits of quiet water that would have delighted an artist; but the neighboring farmers had but an indifferent opinion of the practical value of the place. They only saw in the moss-gray bowlders and rocky ravines and hillsides that which spoiled the farm for agricultural purposes. In their eyes the woodland was Southlake's only redeeming feature, and to draw the timber would cost almost as much as it was worth; the heights were so steep and ledgy. Facetious members of the scattered community adjoining the McClure place were wont to declare that even the sheep which pastured on the hillsides of the farm "had to have their noses filed so as to reach the grass between the bowlders."

Twenty years before, John McClure had purchased Southlake, rather than some more arable farm, as he said, because it reminded him of the rugged Scotland from which he had but recently come. To the New England farm he brought his wife and his brother James, the former quite content to trust to her husband's wisdom regarding the purchase of the land. James said nothing. It was really by his advice that Southlake had been bought, and in advising his brother to this end, James McClure had an object. If John knew the object he had kept it secret from his wife.

James McClure was a studious, thoughtful man, grave in aspect, and as much unlike his frank, outspoken brother as possible. He was a "man with a hobby," and that hobby was mineralogy. His researches in this line had cost him all his little fortune of a thousand pounds; but the knowledge he had gained, he declared, amply repaid him. Here at Southlake he had a noble field for study. And he occupied himself the greater part of the time in exploring the hills, blasting the moss-covered bowlders, and uncovering ledges of granite in the pasture, until at last people declared him either crazy or else searching for treasure—buried gold, or piratical bullion—and "like the treasure of Southlake farm," became a proverb for all doubtful projects throughout the country-side. But the student smiled grimly when he heard the opinions advanced by his neighbors in reference to his "cranky notions."

"Never mind, John; it's a different tune they'll sing when we are successful," he said, "and successful we surely shall be!"

Thus encouraged, John mortgaged his farm for sixteen hundred dollars to carry on his brother's mysterious researches. Nearly three years passed; then Alexander—"Sandy" they always called him

—was born, and at a time when they were sorely pushed for money and the advent of another mouth to feed was a most serious matter.

James was away from home when the child was born. He had gone to another part of the State to confer with certain learned men regarding geological specimens he had found on the farm. It was nearly dusk when he returned, and on entering the sitting-room his found his brother sitting by the window staring out over the sterile and profitless pastures of Southlake. He looked up as James entered, and the smile of satisfaction on his brother's face only seemed to make the cloud upon John's brow the heavier.

"It's no use, Jamie!" said the discouraged farmer, without returning his brother's cordial greeting. "This business of yours has all but ruined me, and now I've another duty, and a higher one, placed upon my shoulders. What with the farm mortgaged and debts pressing me whichever way I turn, I can't carry on this foolishness any longer. What is more, I won't. I believe you've lost faith yourself. But you shall not get me deeper in debt. I don't want anything more to do with it!" The speech which had been commenced in such a hopeless manner ended somewhat angrily as the speak-

er's thoughts reverted to the trouble and embarrassment brought upon him by his brother's investigations.

"What do you mean, John?" cried James McClure, in surprise.

"Just what I say, Jamie. I've lost hope in almost everything. I want nothing more to do with your plans, and as for yourself—well, you're my brother——"

John rose quickly and left the room, leaving the other both astounded and angry at the outbreak. He sat silently gazing into the fire for some time; but at length got up and mounted the stairs to his chamber, from which he presently returned, carrying a light handbag and his overcoat. Sitting down at the old secretary in the corner he wrote a few lines, and folding the paper, thrust it hastily into a pigeonhole, leaving the end protruding just far enough to be seen.

Rising hastily from his chair his heavily-shod foot struck the side of the secretary, and the paper, which he had placed so that it would be easily visible, disappeared with a sharp click. The jar of the blow had sprung a secret drawer in the pigeonhole, and into this drawer the paper dropped. Without noting this fact, James McClure seized his hat, coat,

and handbag, stepped through one of the low windows upon the porch, and, taking the road toward the village, turned his back upon Southlake.

How bitterly had John repented of his anger toward his brother! But repentance was in vain, for James never returned. Hard as he worked, John McClure could make the rocky farm produce only a fairly comfortable living for his family. He struggled bravely on, however, until, when Sandy was seventeen, completely worn out with work and worry, he died, and his widow and his son were left to continue the battle for existence on the sterile farm.

CHAPTER II.

A BOY'S DETERMINATION.

Mr. Ezra Benton, the magnate of Tiverton, was a self-made man. That is, he had been a poor boy, but by honesty and fortunate industry had risen to his present position as owner of the large cotton mills on the bank of Benton Pond. As a rule, there is generally about the self-made man something so arrogantly conceited that he repels everybody. He has a "do-as-I-have-done" and "see-what-I-am" air that makes his society most undesirable. Example is a very good thing; but one does not wish an example continually before one's eyes. At least, not a self-constituted example.

But Ezra Benton was not like this. He was an intelligent, kind-hearted, and pleasant-appearing elderly gentleman, perhaps fifty-five years of age. He was well preserved, his tall, upright form and closely trimmed hair and beard giving him a very soldierly appearance. He had advanced Sandy's father sixteen hundred dollars on Southlake Farm, not be-

cause it was a valuable piece of property, but out of kindly feeling for the hard-working Scotchman. In fact, he would have found it hard to have obtained a purchaser for the place had he wished to foreclose the mortgage; for all his neighbors declared that Southlake was not worth the mortgage on it.

On this afternoon Mr. Benton was sitting by the window in his library, apparently waiting for something or somebody. When Sandy McClure made his appearance at the hall door and was ushered in by the servant Mr. Benton's expectations seemed to have been realized, for he rose and welcomed the boy warmly, saying: "Well, Sandy, how do you do? I was expecting a visit from you very soon."

"Yes, sir. I've come to have a settlement, for, now father's gone, I'm the one to see you in the matter," said the boy, sadly.

"I am heartily sorry for you, my lad, and sorry to lose a friend like John McClure. He was a man whom anyone might be proud to call a friend—upright, honest, and patient under all his trials. Grow up to be such a man as he was, Sandy, and you will be respected by all."

Sandy's face lighted wonderfully at these cordial words. The tears glistened behind the old gentle-

man's spectacles, showing his sincerity, and Sandy wrung his hand again, saying: "I hope I shall prove myself worthy of him, Mr. Benton."

"You surely can, my boy—you surely can! And now, what agreement do you wish to make with me?"

"Well, sir, you know there is a sixteen hundred dollar mortgage on the farm and that the interest amounts to eight dollars each month. Since father's sickness we have not been able to pay that interest, and therefore we owe at present sixteen hundred and sixteen dollars."

"Perfectly correct, Sandy, and calculated in a business-like manner," said Mr. Benton, who dearly loved method in all things. "And now right here let me make you an offer. There is at present an opening in the mill office. Of course, it's not a high position or a very lucrative one, but you will be rapidly advanced if you show yourself worthy of advancement. You've got a business head on those shoulders of yours, and if you are faithful you will rise. Now what do you say to selling the farm, coming here to the village to live, and starting as under-clerk for Ezra Benton?"

Sandy listened to this speech with respectful attention, and, when Mr. Benton had finished, said:

"You are very kind in offering me this situation; but I am not fitted for the place. I have no taste for business."

"Acquire a taste—acquire it!" interrupted Mr. Benton. "I didn't like it forty years ago."

"Not only that," continued the boy, "but there are other reasons. Southlake Farm is undoubtedly one of the finest tracts in New England; but at present it is comparatively worthless. Ten years from now some enterprising man will buy it, build a big hotel, and a fashionable watering place will spring up where is now a worthless wilderness. Father, mother, and myself have talked it over many times, and it is partly for this reason that father held on to it as he did.

"Wait till I am through, if you please," he went on, as Mr. Benton was about to interrupt him. "Now, sir, who would buy Southlake? Would it bring enough to satisfy the mortgage? I think that I can make the farm pay, and, if you will be patient with me, I should like to try. Father was discouraged, and that had more to do with his failure than anything else. Whatever hopes he and my Uncle James had when Southlake was bought fell through before Uncle James left here. He never told either mother or myself the secret. There are

still other objections to my giving up the farm and accepting your very, very kind offer. Mother loves the old place as dearly as I do, and to part with Southlake would almost break her heart. I have no taste for business, and neither am I capable of entering such an office as yours and filling the position assigned me. I am nothing but a green country boy and I know it, Mr. Benton. My deficiencies are many. I never went to school but a few months, and my knowledge of arithmetic is very limited —so limited, in fact, that it would take a year's schooling or more to fit me for a position in your office."

"Are those *all* your objections?" asked Mr. Benton, with a comical groan.

"No, sir, there is still another. We have just finished planting, and it would be a shame to leave the crops to go to waste by moving away."

Mr. Benton was thoughtfully silent for a few moments. "Sandy," he said at length, "I must admit that every one of your reasons is sound. Under the present circumstances it would be a great sacrifice to sell Southlake. There are valuable, though almost inaccessible, woodlands and quarries on it, and although I don't look as far ahead as you do, and see Southlake a summer resort, still it may possibly

come to that some day. If, as you say, you are not capable of accepting a clerkship, we will drop that question for the present. Suppose we compromise in this manner: You shall continue at the farm until next fall and see if it can be made to pay. If it does, then do what you like; but if it doesn't pay, dispose of the place and go into some sort of business. In the meantime study all you possibly can. I will be easy with you on the question of interest."

"You are very kind, sir, and you will lose nothing by it, I assure you," cried Sandy, grasping the hand extended to him.

"Don't hope for too much good fortune. You are working against great odds in carrying out your plans."

"I know it," returned the boy, bravely. "I'll show you what I can accomplish against these odds."

CHAPTER III.

TRESPASSERS ON SOUTHLAKE.

The morning following his talk with Mr. Benton, Sandy McClure started for the wood-lot to mark the timber he intended felling. There is something in the nature of the Scot that clings to old surroundings, old landmarks and old friends, and no amount of Americanizing could erase this characteristic from the McClures. As Sandy gazed about him on the noble trees, he felt less like felling them than before. In this case, however, sentiment had to be sacrificed to duty, and to pay his debts Sandy felt to be the first duty in life.

A rapid walk of ten minutes had brought him to the timber, and with a woodman's practiced eye he very shortly chose a dozen or fifteen trees that were best fitted for felling, as to growth and position on the steep hillside. This done he struck into a well-worn path and thoughtfully wended his way to the northern end of the farm. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of a pretty bit of scenery through the

openings in the forest. Below him were the clear, dancing waters of South Lake, beyond which the rocky fields arose, dotted here and there with clumps of trees. The woods were beyond, and then in the distance the clusters of white-painted dwellings in the village of Tiverton, with the church spire rising above them. How beautiful it all was. And could he let this go? Never, never, as long as Sandy McClure lived!

The path he followed brought him to a part of the farm more rocky than any other portion, where the ledges of granite and slate cropped out in ragged bowlders. Some of these bowlders were cracked and broken as though by an upheaval of nature. They only marked, however, the investigations of James McClure twenty years previous.

"I wonder what Uncle Jim's object could have been in doing this?" thought Sandy. "It looks dreadfully foolish—blowing up rocks with no apparent object. And yet father always said he was a very smart man—a man who studied and thought a great deal. What noble building-blocks this granite would make," he continued, his thoughts turning in another channel. "If this whole place were a gentleman's private park, what a magnificent estate it would be! Quarry right on the farm. Plenty

of timber. A syphon to pump water up to the barn, and even into the house, from the lake—oh, Southlake is a noble place! How I'd like to build a great granite house on the site of the old one. And maybe I will some day. But there's that mortgage, plague take it! I wonder if that's always to bother us?"

With an impatient gesture he turned abruptly and wended his way toward the shores of South Lake. While still some distance from the water he saw a good-sized rowboat with three persons in it, just entering the lake from Benton Pond. Now, it had been a law at Southlake, rigidly enforced, to allow no trespassing on the grounds or lake, at first because James McClure did not wish to be disturbed in his investigations. So a number of signs were painted and put up along the boundaries of the farm and around the lake, positively forbidding trespassing "under penalty of the law." After James went away his brother continued to repaint the signs every spring as before. "I don't want the lake all fished out, the woods set on fire, and the birds hunted in the closed season," John McClure said in defense. "And this would happen, should I allow everyone to enter." But he never refused permission to responsible sportsmen if they applied during the "open" season.

Because of this course, the farm could boast of game and fish preserves of which many wealthy sportsmen would have been proud. Under these circumstances it is not strange that Sandy quickened his steps toward the lakeshore, his cheeks flushed with anger at sight of the occupants of the boat so willfully trespassing on the farm. As the craft approached, Sandy saw that in it were a man and two boys about his own age. One of them he recognized as Frank Carroll, a nephew of Mr. Benton, who lived in Boston.

Frank Carroll, Sandy was informed, had been sent to Tiverton to his uncle's house for the purpose of getting him away from evil influences; but to judge from appearances the plan had not been successful. The other boy, whose name was Brian, was a trifle younger than Frank, and was credited with being one of the worst boys in the village. The man Sandy did not recognize, but his appearance was not at all prepossessing.

Just as the boat reached the shore Sandy stepped out of the bushes and said quietly: "Do you know that you're trespassing on private property?"

"We're not hurting the property, are we?" inquired Frank Carroll, coolly springing ashore and making the painter fast to a sapling. "What have you got to say about it?"

"You will find that I have considerable to say about it unless you immediately return as you came."

"Well, you just hold your breath until we do return as we came," replied Frank, insolently.

"I don't want to have any trouble with you fellows," said Sandy. "But 'no trespassing' is and always has been a strictly enforced law at Southlake."

"Hang your law!" exclaimed the man, suddenly breaking in upon the argument. "We ain't doing any harm to the place, and we don't intend to."

"Of course not, with those rods and that fowling piece in the boat," returned Sandy, sarcastically. "This is the closed season for birds and fish, too. It won't do; you must make yourselves scarce or take the consequences."

"What consequences, I'd like to know?" inquired Frank Carroll, incredulously.

"There is a fine fixed by the State to punish trespassers on private property. Are you going to leave peaceably, or shall I have to take steps to make you obey the law?"

"Look here, young fellow, you're talking altogether too much," exclaimed the man angrily, stepping out of the boat with the fowling piece in his

hand. "Just you shut up an' clear out of this. We're not troubling you, an' we don't intend to be bothered by you. Now git!"

"No, I guess not," was the young farmer's reply. He was growing cooler as he became more angry. "You've made a big mistake in thinking you can scare me. I don't scare worth a cent."

"I'm warning you for the last time that there'll be trouble if you don't make tracks out of here."

"Let the trouble commence, then; but you may find it all on your side."

The man advanced the gun threateningly and said, with an ugly gleam in his eyes that boded evil for his antagonist: "If you don't get sense enough to start by the time I count ten I'll put a little sense into you."

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Sandy thought the man was simply trying to intimidate him, but had he known something of the fellow's past history he might have been more seriously alarmed. As it was, he felt faint and thoroughly frightened for a moment, for he knew that if the piece should happen to go off he could not possibly escape a charge of shot. But very unexpected rescue was at hand. The fowling piece was suddenly seized from behind and wrenched out of the rough's hands, and he was confronted by a tall, wiry young fellow who was "covering" him in the same manner he had a moment before presented the weapon at Sandy. The newcomer had approached so silently that he was not noticed.

"Don't shoot!" cried the man, dodging behind a tree-trunk far too small to protect him. "Don't point that gun this way like that—it might go off!"

"Steady, my hearty!" was the response, in a rather melodious voice. "Don't get scared. This

isn't the wild and woolly West, though, to judge from your actions a few moments ago, one would think it was. Now suppose you take this young gentleman's advice and 'stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once.' Hold on a moment!" continued the stranger, as the vanquished rough sullenly clambered into the boat, followed by his two companions. Sandy's unknown champion discharged the weapon in the air, and then rapped the lock smartly on a bowlder. "There," he said, handing back the gun. "I think that I have given the gunsmith a job before that can be used to any purpose. Now oblige this young gentleman by moving, and keep right on until you are outside the limits of his farm."

As the boat disappeared Sandy's rescuer turned with a smile toward him. "I should say those boys were in very bad company. That fellow is mean enough for almost anything that doesn't require much courage. His natural cowardice alone keeps him from being a villain."

While he was speaking Sandy looked him over carefully. He had the appearance of a man of twenty-five or six. A two weeks' growth of beard did much to mar his natural good looks. His dress was a ragged frock coat, once black, but now a rusty

brown, a pair of worn shoes through which his feet could be seen, flashily-checked pantaloons very much frayed at the bottoms, the whole crowned by an old slouch hat. His get-up was that of a *very* professional tramp.

"I was in greater danger than I fancied," said Sandy, gravely; "and your arrival was timely."

"I saw you from that rock, and from what I heard I thought there might be trouble, so I slid around behind that tree yonder so as to be of assistance if you needed me."

"It was fortunate that you did, and I thank you very much for your aid," said Sandy.

There was an awkward pause for a moment.

"I—I—you see, I came along here from the village last night in a slightly hilarious condition. I crawled under the fence and spent the night by that rock yonder." The tone in which this admission was made was evidently intended to convey an air of careless indifference to the fact that the speaker had been in a state of beastly intoxication. But as Sandy still remained silent the fellow continued with increasing embarrassment: "I was not aware that no one was allowed on your property, or I should not have trespassed—that is, if I hadn't been too woozy to know much of anything."

While these sentences were being uttered, Sandy studied the tramp's features, to his evident confusion. "So you were drunk?" said Sandy, slowly, seating himself on a rock close by. "Now, I never *was* drunk."

The tramp stared at the boy a moment, and then, with a short, bitter laugh, said: "No, I don't believe you ever were. Youv'e no cause."

"How do you know? I have just as much cause to drink as you have."

"What do you know about it?" inquired the stranger, gruffly.

"Why, I know considerable about it," was the unruffled reply. "Perhaps you've seen trouble and you'll say that's what has driven you to drink. Maybe I've seen more trouble than you have."

"That's not likely. I can't make out just what you're driving at, my friend, but you listen a moment and I'll tell you just why I drink."

The tramp took a seat upon a neighboring bowlder, but with his face turned from Sandy, and began: "In the first place, I have a natural taste for stimulants, and this inherited taste was fed at my father's own table till I got past respectability in my drinking, and then I was kicked out like a dog. Yes, sir, driven out of my father's house and com-

manded never to enter it again! Would that serve to reform me, do you think? I was always a wild fellow, loved wild company, and was crazy after horses. Before I was of age I won and lost two small fortunes 'playing the ponies.' When I became of age I acted so that I was driven out forever—disinherited. Oh, I don't say but I deserved it all; but wasn't the taste for liquor born in me and cultivated in my father's house? And because I was not as strong-willed as he, he disowned me. I've got a younger brother, who, before I left home four years ago, showed promise of going the same way. I wonder if he will!"

The tramp ceased speaking and gazed thoughtfully across the lake for a moment. Then he continued: "I don't know why I tell you this, for I never talk to anyone about my life. I want to forget that I was ever anybody else but Charlie Norcross."

"I'm glad you have told me," said Sandy. "If you don't mind, tell me what you have done since leaving home."

"What *haven't* I done? That's an easier question to answer. I had about a thousand dollars when I went off—money an old uncle left me. It took me just two days to gamble the greater part

of that away—the whole of it, I thought at the time. I wandered about the streets of the city till night and then went toward the docks, determined to end it all——"

"What! to drown yourself?" cried his listener, horrified.

"That was my intention. But as I passed down one of the long piers, happening to thrust my hand into my pocket, I found a crumpled ten dollar bill. It stopped me. I was at a loss what to do with it. If I was going to commit suicide I didn't want that ten dollar bill. The thought came to me to turn back and give it to the first poor person I met. I immediately went back to the street for that purpose; however, on my way still another thought came—why not take the bill as a starter and try to make life worth living, somewhere far away from the city? I made up my mind to do so, and not even waiting for the morning, set my face resolutely away from the city, determined to be somebody. But it was no use!

"First I hired out to a farmer by the name of Jackson. I liked the place and they liked me, and by staying there I might have been a respectable, sober man, instead of the worthless reprobate I am. I had been there over a year when one day I

happened to run across an old acquaintance in the village. This chance meeting woke all the old feeling within me. I drank with him, and—well, I went back to the farm that night drunk, the first time I had tasted liquor in more than a year. I could not stay with Jackson after that. There was enough shame in me in those days to keep me from meeting his wife or daughter, and I only saw Jackson himself for a few moments. He wanted me to stay and try it over again; but I knew it would be no use. I went back to the race track, drove some, and went from bad to worse, till lately I've taken to tramping it. Now, isn't that a beautiful life to lead?" The bitterness with which this last was spoken cannot be expressed in words.

"Why don't you stop it? Cut loose from it all!" cried Sandy, warmly, springing to his feet. "Put on the brakes just where you are, and *stop!*"

"Stop it? That's easier said than done. Who's going to trust me—a vagabond, drunken tramp?"

"I am, for one," was the reply.

CHAPTER V.

NORCROSS MAKES A NEW START.

"I'm much obliged to you, young fellow," said the tramp, despondently; "but it's no use. I'm too far gone to be reclaimed."

"I don't believe it," responded Sandy, firmly. "You would keep sober enough if you were not in constant temptation. You have worked on a farm and I am in need of help. Will you work for me?"

"Work for you?"

"Yes, for me—or my mother rather. You can stay right here. There'll be no necessity of your going off the farm, and you can start again and be somebody. I wouldn't give up if I were you, for there are years before you in which you may enjoy life. I don't believe there's much real enjoyment in getting drunk, is there?"

"No."

"Well, then, will you stay? Commence by throwing that flask, which you have in your pocket, away. I have two horses and three cows on the

place and about fifteen acres of land under cultivation. The work won't be very hard. What do you say to sixteen dollars a month?"

"Agreed!" exclaimed Charlie Norcross, rising from his seat and offering his hand to the boy. "I'll try."

Sandy clasped the hand of the tramp in silence and with a fervor that bespoke his friendly feeling better than words. "What you want now," he said, as they walked toward the house, "is a square meal; and I think by the height of the sun that it is about dinner time."

"I guess something to eat would brace me up," returned Norcross. "And after I get a good bath I shall feel far more respectable."

"You shall have that before dinner. You can have a tub, plenty of hot water, soap, and towels in the barn."

"Thanks. Your mother won't object to my appearance, I hope?"

"Not at all."

"If I had a razor I could make my face look a little better by getting off this beard."

"I will get you one if you wish, and perhaps I can find some clothes that will fit you."

"Well, mother," said Sandy, entering the kitchen, "I've hired a man to help me on the farm."

"Who. Anyone we know?"

"No, I never saw him before today. His name is Charles Norcross, he tells me, and lately he's been tramping. But he is willing to work, and I've made him an offer of sixteen dollars a month. You'll have to put him in the east room and I'll sleep down stairs."

"For pity's sake! Where did you find the man?"

"Oh, I ran across him this morning. Of course I don't know anything about him, only what he's told me. But I like his looks, and I think you will, too. He's a young man—not more than twenty-five or six. Just now he's out in the barn making himself presentable. His clothes are in poor condition. I wonder if there isn't anything in the house that would fit him?"

"If you think he's all right," said Mrs. McClure, doubtfully. "You are a very good judge of people, and I suppose you know better than I what sort of a man you want."

"Wait till he comes in to dinner and then see what *you* think of him."

"Well, I'll see what I can find," said the good woman, hurrying away to the attic, from which she presently returned with some garments which were at least whole and clean. These, together with shav-

ing materials, Sandy took to the barn. In half an hour the ex-tramp appeared, dressed in a decent suit, with his face smoothly shaven. He presented such a different appearance from the wretched-looking being who had entered the barn a short time before that Sandy could not suppress an exclamation of surprise.

"You think it an improvement?" asked Norcross.

"Yes, a decided one."

"I am very much obliged for these clothes, Mr. McClure——"

"Hold on! Don't call me 'Mister.' I'm not used to it. Everybody calls me Sandy, although I suppose I was christened Alexander. As for the clothes, you must thank mother for them. Let's go in to dinner now; I guess it's ready."

Charlie was duly presented to Mrs. McClure and she was more favorably impressed by him than she expected to be. In fact, he did not at all answer to her idea of a tramp. Throughout the meal he showed the careful etiquette of a gentleman, making it evident to the shrewd New England boy that he had been accustomed to polite society. After dinner Charlie went to work under Sandy's supervision, and when night came he proved himself as ca-

pable at milking the cows at Sandy himself. After supper Charlie expressed a wish to retire, so he was shown up to the cozy east room and left to his own reflections. What they were no one but God knows. But Charlie Norcross went to sleep that night with a feeling that he had been reclaimed, and a determination to make a man of himself.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAMPFIRE ON THE SHORE.

Early the next morning Sandy and his new man started for the wood-lot. Charlie was no woodsman, and he gazed with astonishment at the boy, whose steady ringing strokes brought the trees crashing to the earth. "It isn't so much the strength," said Sandy, laughing, "as the 'know how' that tells. Now watch my stroke, and take yours just the same. I'll chop slow."

The chips once more flew about the young woodsman, but Charlie made poor work of it. "Well, you'll catch the stroke after a while," said Sandy, encouragingly. "I think you had better chop lengths, however, till you get used to swinging an ax."

So they worked all day. Not too hard, for Sandy was wise enough to see that if the work was too arduous at first Charlie might get tired of his new life. In the evening it was pleasant for both Sandy and his mother to have a third person in the house,

and when Charlie opened the little melodeon that had long been unused, and added to its notes the tones of his own well-trained voice, they were both surprised and pleased. Old songs he sang, some of them Scotch ballads, which carried Mrs. McClure's thoughts beyond the sea, and the memory brought tears to her eyes and a tenderness to her heart toward the young fellow who sang so sweetly the songs of her old home.

"It do soun' pretty, indeed," she exclaimed, half laughing, half crying, as the last notes of "Annie Laurie" died away. "I wish my ain laddie co' sing like yersel'."

Sandy laughed heartily at his mother's momentary lapse into the Scotch brogue; but Charlie said quickly: "I like that, Mrs. McClure. I had an old Scotch nurse when I was a little shaver, who talked just as you do. She was like a mother to me —the only mother I ever knew. She had charge of my father's house until I was five years old. Then my father married, and she went away."

"It's not often she puts on the brogue," said Sandy. "It's like the old desk there—used on very few occasions."

"I noticed that old secretary," said Charlie, his attention attracted to the antique piece of furniture.

"That came with us from Scotland," said Mrs. McClure, proudly. "It's very valuable."

"Dreadful rickety, though," said Sandy. "See how loose this back-board is. I must fix that the next rainy day, mother. Father never used the desk very much, nor allowed it to be used. It belonged to Uncle Jim, and some of his papers are in it now."

"It's a fine old piece of furniture," remarked Charlie. "All solid mahogany, too. That would bring a fancy price at some of the antique furniture rooms in Boston."

"Yes, I presume so; but I wouldn't part with it for anything," said Mrs. McClure. "It's the only thing I have to remember dear old Scotland by."

This was only one of the many pleasant evenings they spent together, until by the time a month had passed Mrs. McClure began to look on the hired man as a second son, and he was treated by Sandy more like an old chum than a recent acquaintance. Charlie Norcross was very grateful to these kind friends, and he determined to show them that he had not lost his manhood.

Everything about the farm seemed to run smoothly. The crops flourished, more wood was cut, and work was begun in a new part of the farm by clearing the rocks away. In planning the work Sandy

showed a remarkable forethought for one so young, and altogether the prospect looked bright for Southlake and its residents.

As Charlie and Sandy were returning to the house after doing the chores one evening, the latter stopped abruptly by the door stoop and gazed intently toward the north.

"What is it?" questioned Charlie.

"Don't you see smoke rising out there? It's either on the northern shore of South Lake or on this side of Benton Pond."

"Well, I declare! I can't see anything," said Charlie, after looking carefully in the direction indicated.

"Why, it's just as plain! It's darker than the sky."

"Yes, now I do see a streak of something; but how do you know it's smoke?"

"Oh, I know well enough. There's a fire just been started down there. I'll go over and see about it. It won't do to have the woods burned."

Sandy started off at a rapid pace, leaving Charlie to carry the milk into the dairy and finish the chores. Skirting South Lake the young farmer plunged into the woods and made his way more carefully toward the shore of Benton Pond. As he neared the

pond he was assured of the presence of trespassers by hearing someone talking. Then a voice rang out, clear and sweet, singing "The Campbells are Coming" in tones so much like those of Charlie Norcross that it startled Sandy. Whether it was the song or the tones of the voice that sounded so familiar he could not tell.

He reached a bank that fell some eight feet to the shore and peered stealthily over. Underneath a fire was burning brightly, and by its light he saw a boat drawn up on the sand. Three persons were busily engaged in camp duties—one bringing fuel, another carrying cooking-utensils from the boat to the campfire, while the third was bringing a bucket of water from the spring a few rods distant. The latter was the singer, and as he approached the fire Sandy recognized Frank Carroll. His companions were the boy and man with whom Sandy had seen him a few weeks before.

"This is a pretty go!" thought Sandy. "What shall I do about it, I wonder? I don't believe it's safe to pick a fuss with those fellows again. As they are camping on my land I'll stay here a few minutes and find out what they're about." So he stretched himself comfortably on the brow of the bank above the campfire, and prepared to watch the proceedings of the worthy trio.

Frank Carroll broke off suddenly in his song and exclaimed: "I say, Ben, isn't supper 'most ready? Seems to me you're awful slow." The man replied gruffly that he guessed he could get a meal "as quick as the next one." "Oh, well, don't get huffy about it. You've been as ugly as the dickens ever since that tramp got the best of you the other day; hasn't he, Jack?"

"You bet he has," replied young Brian.

"If you chaps don't shut up you won't get no supper tonight," said Ben, angrily.

"Oh, go West!" was Frank's cool reply. Then he continued in a ruminative tone. "Kinder funny how that tramp dropped onto us just as you were going to settle young McClure. Too bad you didn't do it."

"What did you want to do up there in South Lake, anyway?" asked Brian. "We told you they didn't 'low no trespassing, and was mighty strict about it. We're on the old farm now, and it's more than likely that young McClure'll have cheek enough to come and order us off."

"If he does I'll wring his neck for him!" said the man, savagely.

"What did you want us to go up there for?" asked Frank, repeating Jack Brian's question.

"Oh, I wanted to see something of the place," was the evasive reply.

"Come now, no chaff! Lots you cared about seeing the farm. You said you'd tell us and let us into the racket if we'd help you."

"So yer did!" cried Brian.

"If I tell you two," said the man, thoughtfully, "you've got to promise that you'll never breathe a word of what I say an' that you'll help me. If we get the treasure we'll share an' share alike. Will you promise?"

CHAPTER VII.

BEN STEARNS'S STORY.

"Oh, we'll promise," said Frank Carroll. "It's only fair that you should let us into this thing."

"All right, I'll trust you chaps, though there ain't another but myself as knows it. Let's have supper first, and then I'll spin my yarn while I smoke. Supper's all ready; fall to."

Sandy had made up his mind to slip away at some favorable point in the conversation, but the secret the man was about to divulge made him as curious as Frank or Brian. He decided to stay a little longer and hear what the mystery was, and in what way it was connected with Southlake Farm. The meal was dispatched with much merriment, and a flask of liquor was passed among the campers, from which they all took a drink. Then the fumes of tobacco rose in a cloud, and Ben began his tale:

"There ain't no use of my beginning too far back and telling you how I came to ship aboard the Mary Lee, six years ago, bound from New York to

Para. I've been to sea ever since I was a little shaver, an' I'd be on the water now if I hadn't some business right up here to attend to. I say I shipped on the Mary Lee, an' there I fell in with a man that called himself Jim Stoker. He wasn't a 'Merican chap, though he talked straight English as well as the ol' man did. We struck a gale off the Southern Bermudas that sent us on our beam ends, an' after beating about for twenty-four hours with a hole in her bottom, the Mary Lee went down an' most of the crew with her. I got onto a hatch more dead than alive with Jim Stoker. He had a terrible cut in the head and was in bad shape. I did all I could for him, but I knew he couldn't last long. He lay kinder stupid for an hour or two, an' then he roused up, an' says he:

"'Ben Stearns, you're from Tiverton, Massachusetts, ain't you?' 'I be,' says I, a bit surprised, for I hadn't let on to him where I was from. 'So am I,' says he, 'or leastways I lived there 'leven or twelve years ago.' 'You did?' says I, wondering what was goin' to follow. 'Yes, I lived just outside the village, on Southlake Farm,' says he. 'My name ain't Stoker; it's McClure.' Well, you may just believe I was surprised to hear that——"

"Who was Jim McClure? Some relation of this

Sandy McClure who thinks he runs Southlake?" interrupted Frank.

"You mean to say you never heard of ol' man McClure's brother Jim?" cried Ben Stearns.

"Never did."

"These McClures, you see, came to Southlake twenty-odd years ago, an' this Jim McClure was about the biggest fool (so folks said) that ever any one see. He was forever pokin' round on the farm for something or other—gold or some treasure buried here."

"Buried gold!" exclaimed Frank; "that's stale."

"Is it? Just wait till I get through and then you can say all you want to. This Jim McClure got in a huff with his brother an' left the farm when I was a boy. I think it was on the very day that this Sandy young sculpin we seen the other day was born. Now where was I? Oh, as I said, I was surprised to hear my shipmate declare he was Jim McClure, but I was more surprised at what he told me." The speaker paused a moment, and the other campers leaned forward in eager expectation. "'I ain't never heard from John since I saw him last,' began my shipmate. 'Tell me how he is prospering. Has he got plenty? Is he rich?' 'Rich! Well I guess not,' says I, 'unless you call about four hundred

acres of pretty nigh worthless land with a mortgage on it, riches.'

"'Worthless!' cried Jim; 'ain't he realized nothin' from it?' 'Yes, he's realized a big crop of rocks and a few vegetables off the place.' When I told him this he seemed all struck aback, and for a few moments he lay silent. 'Didn't he ever find anything on the farm?' he asked at last. 'Never heard of it if he did,' says I. 'I want you to do something for me, Ben Stearns,' he said. 'I ain't got long to live. That I know well enough without your telling me. Promise me that you'll go direct to Southlake as soon as you can, for you'll be saved, though I won't. Tell my brother what I tell you as near word for word as possible.'"

"Go on, Ben; what is it?" cried Frank, eagerly, as the other paused.

"'Tell John McClure,' says he, 'that I forgive him, as I know he has forgiven me long ago. Tell him, too, that I was not unsuccessful in my search for the treasure; *but that in the second right-hand pigeonhole of the old secretary there is a paper which will tell him exactly where to find the deposit.*' It was 'most four years ago when I heard them words first; but I got 'em straight all right!" The sailor paused and looked at his two companions,

whose countenances plainly showed their intense interest. But if *they* were surprised and astonished at the tale, Sandy McClure's astonishment was far greater. "Well," continued the sailor, less excitedly, "I was saved by the ship Lamphear, bound for Australia, but Jim died before the rescue came. When I got to Australia I skipped from the Lamphear 'cause I couldn't stand the ol' man, an' tramped through the bush a bit—tried my luck in the gold fields, too. Then I shipped to England, but I never reached there, for the ship sunk off the French coast, and the surf nigh 'bout beat my brains out when we were landin'. I laid in the hospital for a long time, for I being a 'Merican the British government didn't care a straw whether I lived or died. After a time I got my health back, but they told me I didn't know much. I reckon they were right, for I don't remember a thing that happened durin' all the time I was sick. The Sisters of Mercy that tended me set me to work in their convent garden.

"Well, after quite a spell, I began to get my mind back, and last fall the doctor said I was all right. I remembered things kinder slow at first, but one of the first things I remembered was my shipmate's secret. So I made a bee-line for New York. I fell in with an old pal of mine there and borrowed

enough money to bring me on here. And do you know what I'm here for? I'm here after that hidden treasure, and mark my words, I'm 'a going to get it in some way. Now, what I want to know is, will you two strike hands with me? I need your help, and we'll divy even on the plunder."

"Betcher life we will!" replied Brian, without a moment's hesitation.

"Count on me, too," said Frank Carroll.

"That's the talk!" almost shouted Stearns, excitedly. "And the sooner we do the job the better."

"But suppose the whole thing is a hoax?" suggested Frank. "Suppose the fellow who told you —this Jim McClure—was cracked? Or suppose they have already found the paper, and there wasn't any treasure there after all?"

"We've got to risk that," replied Ben. "'Tain't likely they'd find the paper without somebody knowin' it. And I don't believe Jim McClure was any more crazy than me."

"How shall we get the paper?" asked Frank, reflectively.

"That'll be your part of the job," replied Ben. "It's the easiest part of the whole affair, and you said you had been in the house."

"So I have. I know just where the secretary stands, and I'll try to get the paper this very night, if you fellows will back me up."

"Of course we will, though there ain't any danger at all," said Ben. "There's nobody but that boy an' the old woman in the house. I'll stand by to settle the boy an' the woman won't interfere. She'll be too scared."

As the sailor spoke he raised his eyes to the brow of the bank where Sandy McClure lay crouching on the ground. The listener saw that he was discovered, but before he could dodge back and escape, the man sprang to his feet with a savage yell and catching up Frank Carroll's fowling piece pointed it directly at his head. "Come out of that!" he shouted with an imprecation, and at the command the bushes parted and Sandy hastily scrambled down the bank.

The three conspirators were as much alarmed at Sandy's appearance as he was at his capture. Ben Stearns still covered him with the weapon, but for a full minute did not offer to touch him.

"Grab that sneak!" he at last commanded, with a wicked gleam in his eye; "an' if he gets out of this alive I miss my guess."

Sandy quietly suffered himself to be bound by the

two boys, for he knew resistance was useless against such odds. And he did not believe the sailor was really as desperate as his words implied.

"The jig's up!" said Frank, despondently, after laying Sandy down with his arms and ankles securely tied.

"Not yet," cried Stearns. "This chap was alone, or whoever was with him would have shown up. *His* jig is up, that I can tell you!"

"You ain't going to kill him?" cried both boys, startled at the words.

"I'll show you what I'll do," returned the sailor, savagely. "In the first place I'll trice him up to this tree so's he can't give us the slip." He dragged the prisoner to a tree some few yards away from the fire and with the boat's painter fastened him in an upright position to the trunk. Then he and the two boys conferred together for a few moments, after which Ben and Jack Brian returned to watch the prisoner, while Frank started off through the woods in the direction of the farmhouse.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEAD MAN'S MESSAGE.

In the meantime Charlie Norcross had finished the chores, and as they had eaten supper some time previous, went directly to his room. By half past eight all was quiet about the house, for Mrs. McClure had retired without waiting for her son to return, and Charlie sat silently at his window gazing out into the darkness for Sandy. Too busy with his thoughts to notice the flight of time and the long absence of the boy, he was aroused by the sound of a light step on the walk. A figure came out of the gloom and silently approached the side door. "Sandy has returned," thought the young man as he heard the outer door open gently.

The supposed Sandy McClure seemed a little unfamiliar with the house, however, for he stood a moment in the entry, as though doubtful which door to open. At last he turned the knob of the left-hand one and stepped softly into the dimly-lighted room. Just opposite the entrance stood the tall secretary,

and without further hesitation he crossed the room and stood listening a moment to make sure that he had aroused no one.

"In the second right-hand pigeonhole," he muttered, as he thrust his hand into the aperture.

The pigeonhole was empty; but as he touched the bottom board it moved under his hand, as though it were hung on a pivot. Pressing hard upon the board it sprang open with a loud snap. The sound startled him and he waited a moment before proceeding in his search. As he heard nothing in the house stir he turned again to the desk and thrust his hand as far as possible into the secret compartment. The tips of his fingers barely touched a folded paper which lay on the bottom of the drawer, but with some maneuvering he managed to draw it out. The board returned to its place with another sharp click and immediately a step on the stairs warned the intruder of the approach of one of the inmates. He quickly raised one of the low windows, and with the stolen paper clutched tightly in his hand leaped upon the piazza just as Charlie Norcross opened the hall door and stepped outside. Charlie sprang upon the thief before he could escape. There was a short, fierce struggle; Charlie grasped the paper instead of his antagonist's hand,

and receiving a blow that almost felled him to the ground, the young man lost his hold upon the thief, who fled into the darkness, *leaving half the stolen document behind him.*

Charlie rose in a rather dazed condition, and, hearing Mrs. McClure speak, stepped inside.

"Who's there?" inquired the widow from her chamber.

"It's I, ma'am," replied Charlie, quietly.

"Hasn't Sandy returned?"

"Not yet. If you wish me to I'll go out and see if I can find him?"

"I wish you would."

Charlie took down Sandy's gun from its rack in the kitchen, and after making sure that it was charged, sallied forth. "What under the sun that chap wanted, I don't know," he muttered. "If he stole anything he's well off by this time, and the first thing is to find Sandy."

He started in the direction Sandy had taken and stumbled along in the darkness. It was all of an hour before he reached the shore of Benton Pond. As he arrived at the top of the bank where Sandy had lain all through Ben Stearns's strange story, a boat with two figures in it was just leaving the shore, while the embers of a campfire smoldered on the sand.

"Hullo there!" called Charlie.

"Hullo yourself," was the response.

"Have you seen a boy by the name of McClure about here?" inquired Charlie, clambering down the bank.

"Here I am, Charlie!" suddenly shouted Sandy's well-known voice. "They've tied me to a tree here. Don't let 'em get away!"

"Come back here," yelled Norcross, excitedly, raising his weapon to his shoulder.

"Two can play at that game," was the response, and the moonlight, peering from behind a mass of black clouds for a moment, glinted along the polished barrel of his weapon as the speaker rose in the stern of the boat. Charlie immediately lowered his own gun, and while he hesitated the boat got out of range.

"Untie me, will you?" cried Sandy. "Those fellows triced me up so tightly that I can hardly breathe." His bonds were loosed in a moment. "Well, I put my foot in it nicely!" he exclaimed, before Charlie could speak. "If ever there was a stupid dunce I'm one."

"Who are they, and why did they tie you up?" inquired Charlie.

"Oh, let's go home. I'll tell you when we get there. I suppose mother is scared half to death."

"She was a little alarmed, I guess. Somebody's been prowling around the house; but he got away from me."

"I know it—I know it," groaned Sandy. "It was one of those fellows in the boat."

"I don't know whether he stole anything or not. I saw him come in, but thought it was you. Did he get anything?"

"Did he get anything?" repeated Sandy, wildly. "He stole a paper out of the old secretary that is worth ten thousand dollars!"

"Ten thousand dollars!" cried Charlie, in bewilderment.

"Yes, sir; when we get home I'll tell you all about it," repeated Sandy.

When they reached the house they found Mrs. McClure dressed and waiting for them. "Well! you have given me a scare tonight, Sandy," she said, as the two young men entered the room. "I have imagined all sorts of terrible things happening to you. Where have you been?"

"Sit down, both of you," returned Sandy, "and listen to what I have to tell you. I've had an adventure, and I'm afraid this night has cost us a great deal unless we can catch the rogues." Then Sandy went on to give an account of what had be-

fallen him during the evening. After repeating Ben Stearns's wonderful story and telling how he himself was captured, he said:

"Just as soon as I saw Frank Carroll——"

"Frank *who?*" cried Charlie, starting from his chair. "Who did you say?"

"Frank Carroll. Do you know him?"

"The name sounds very familiar," replied the other. "What is he doing up here?"

"Why, didn't I tell you that he was Mr. Benton's nephew, and had been sent up here to Tiverton to keep out of bad company? Judging from appearances, however, the experiment has been a failure. He could not find worse company than that of this sailor and Jack Brian."

"Do you know him?" asked Mrs. McClure.

"I know *of* him," was Charlie's reply, and a pained expression crossed his face. "Go on with your story, Sandy," he continued. "The name quite startled me. What happened next?"

"As I was saying, when I saw Frank Carroll leave the other two and start off through the woods, I knew he was coming here——"

"There! I thought I heard some one in the sitting room," interrupted his mother. "But he didn't get the paper that your Uncle James wrote so long ago, did he?"

"He did."

"Why, Sandy, I have cleared out all those pigeonholes and all the drawers a number of times; and I'm sure there was no paper there," returned Mrs. McClure.

"But he has it, just the same. I'll show you where it was hidden. You see this drawer is not long enough to fill all the space, and right back of it is a secret box or drawer that can only be opened by pushing the bottom of this second pigeonhole out of place," and he opened the hidden compartment by way of illustration. "By the merest chance Frank found the drawer, and was getting away with the paper when Charlie discovered him. They had a struggle out on the piazza. Frank got away with part of the paper; now, Charlie, have you got the rest?"

"I remember he had a paper in his hand, and when I grabbed at him I got hold of the paper instead of his hand, and it tore in two. Then he struck me a stunning blow in the face that almost knocked me down. The scrap of paper dropped from my hand, and must be on the piazza now."

"Let's look for it; come on!" cried Sandy, excitedly.

"No, finish your story first," said his mother.

"All right. When Frank got back to the camp they read the paper. I heard Ben Stearns ask how many dollars £2,000 was. If there is £2,000 in the treasure, that would be nearly $10,000. Just think of it, mother! But weren't they mad when Frank told how the paper got torn; and from what I heard them say I think that the direction for finding the treasure is on the scrap of paper that Charlie tore off. Ben Stearns accused Frank of having torn the paper so as to get the treasure himself; but Brian stood up for him, and the man found the boys too much for him. Then he undertook to take the boat and leave them. He didn't do it, though, for Frank declared that it was his boat, and said that he and Brian were going to have it if they had to fight. So, as the boys had the gun, and Stearns wasn't armed, he thought discretion the better part of valor, and yielded forthwith."

"Isn't it terrible?" sighed Mrs. McClure. "What will become of those two boys?"

"I know something that will become of them," returned Sandy, "and they'll know it, too, when the sheriff gets after them. They think that there's no law up here in the country; but they will find out that there is. As for the man, Ben Stearns, he's a rascal, and I'm afraid of him."

"I'll get the lantern and we'll search for that paper," said Charlie. "Perhaps that may throw some light on the subject."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIDDEN CROSS.

The paper was found crumpled up in a corner of the piazza, and Sandy brought it in and examined it eagerly, with his mother and Charlie leaning over his shoulder. The fac-simile of what they saw is given on page 64.

"That is your uncle's writing, Sandy," said Mrs. McClure.

"What does it mean? Can you make head or tail of it, Charlie?"

"It plainly gives the spot where the 'er deposit' is," returned Charlie. "Now what can the 'er deposit' mean? It can't mean money deposit, for e-r are not the last letters of money."

"Silver deposit," suggested Sandy.

"That's it—silver deposit," cried Charlie. "Now what do those two words at the top mean—'con,' or 'com,' and 'ugh'?

"Don't know," said Sandy. "They probably have nothing to do with the treasure itself. 'Fif-

high
deposit of pulmotor
Line: To South pasture 15 to 20 yards
from hidden marked with a cross
thus X. on chicken line with pine slump
God bless and prosper you
James Pulham

teen or twenty yards from a bowlder marked with a cross,' eh? I never saw such a bowlder, though I've been all over the south pasture. Do you know of any rock marked in that way, mother?"

"No. But don't get excited over this, my son; perhaps there will be nothing to repay you for your search. I never knew that your Uncle James was hunting for buried treasure of any description. He was a mineralogist of no small repute and had great hopes of finding among the rocks of Southlake a recompense for his investigations. So I understood."

"But that's foolish, mother," said Sandy, impatiently. "I don't believe it has anything to do with quarries or rocks, for he told Ben Stearns plainly that it was treasure. He may have found this quite by accident."

"Perhaps it is a silver mine that he found," suggested Charlie, "though I never heard of silver in New England."

"I don't know what it is, but I mean to find out if I live till tomorrow."

"It's tomorrow now," laughed Charlie. "It's half past one."

"Come, we'll all go to bed," said Mrs. McClure. "The treasure can wait till morning," and the conference was adjourned.

Next morning Sandy was so eager to search the south pasture for his uncle's buried treasure that he could hardly wait to eat breakfast. He hurried Charlie through the chores, and bothered his mother when she wanted to wash the dishes. At last all three started for the pasture, Sandy and Charlie carrying a pick and shovels.

"We must first find the bowlder with a cross on it," said Mrs. McClure, distressed at the boys' excitement. "Don't be too sanguine, my son. I have no faith in this at all."

"Perhaps I am acting foolishly about it," said Sandy, laughing. "But it seems so altogether strange and wonderful—just like a chapter out of a romance—that I can't help getting worked up about it. Just think what we could do with ten thousand dollars, mother! There's the mortgage to be paid——"

"There, there! dont talk any more about it. Let us wait and see."

"A bowlder with a cross on it, eh?" said Charlie Norcross. "Well, it looks to me as though we had quite a task before us. There seems to be an extra supply of bowlders in the field today. I don't remember seeing so many here before. I'm afraid you won't get that late corn planted this morning, Sandy."

"Oh, bother the corn!" returned Sandy. "We'll attend to that this afternoon. Just now we'll make a desperate effort to find this treasure. I sha'n't be able to work contentedly until I know whether there is anything to it or not. I guess nobody's been ahead of us, for we alone have the directions. Now let's see if there is a cross on this bowlder."

Inspection of the rock showed no such mark, and the sheep fled wildly before them as they separated to search in different parts of the pasture. Bowlder after bowlder was carefully scrutinized without success.

"Why not find the pine tree stump spoken of in the paper?" suggested Charlie. "Then perhaps it will be easier to find the bowlder."

"Let me think for a moment," said Mrs. McClure. "It seems to me there used to be a pine tree in this field that was struck by lightning the summer we moved here. Perhaps that is the one your uncle meant, Sandy."

"Struck by lightning, eh? Left a stump ten or twelve feet high?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I know where that stood, then. We cut it down last fall. It stood about here," and Sandy walked a little distance to the right. "Ah, here's the spot."

"Now we are getting warm," said Charlie. "Bowlder on direct line with pine tree stump. How's this?" and he walked off toward a great moss covered rock five or six rods away.

"Is there a cross on it?" inquired Sandy, eagerly.

"I don't see any," was the response, as Charlie examined the bowlder carefully on all sides. "This is a peculiarly shaped rock, though. See how straight nature cut this side of it—the side facing the stump."

"But there isn't any mark on it, is there?" asked Sandy again.

"Not a sign of one; only a lot of moss. It's almost entirely covered with moss."

"Lots of good that will do us," grumbled Sandy.

"That moss isn't to be despised," returned Charlie, pulling off a handful as he spoke. "It's about the best stuff to kindle a fire with that I ever saw. I shouldn't wonder if it was some relation to the species the Esquimaux use for fuel. There's lots of it here, too. See this big handful," and the young man pulled off some more.

The next moment he bent eagerly forward and scrutinized the face of the rock. Then taking one of the spades he cleared the moss entirely off the side facing them. Stripped of its gray shroud the

rock stood exposed, and deeply cut into its surface was an irregular cross.

"The cross! there it is!" shouted Sandy, and even Mrs. McClure was visibly excited.

"Yes, there it is," said Charlie Norcross. "Now what?"

"'Fifteen or twenty yards from bowlder, direct line with stump,'" repeated Sandy. "This is about the place," he continued, pacing off the distance. "It must be somewhere along here."

He was standing in a slight indenture in the soil where the ground might, at some time, have been disturbed, but was now covered with vegetation. Sandy marked out a place with his spade about fifteen feet by six and began to remove the sod. Both set to work in earnest, while Mrs. McClure seated herself on a rock and gazed across the lake. The sun struggled through the drifting clouds now and then and lighted up her grave face. Sandy noticed her anxiety and whispered to Charlie:

"I wish she didn't know about this. If we don't find anything it would be better for her not to have known."

"Oh, we *must* find something," returned Charlie hopefully. "This is not the first time this earth has been removed. Do you notice how the gravel is mixed in with the loam? Nature builds in layers."

"We'll see."

Their task was no small one, as they were soon to realize. The earth seemed harder and more compact as they proceeded, and finally Sandy changed his shovel for the pick. At almost the first blow he struck something harder than the earth. A piece of rock glanced up and narrowly escaped hitting Charlie in the head.

"A ledge!" exclaimed Sandy.

"Oh, no, I guess not."

"We'll soon see," and he set to work again in a fever of impatience.

"Perhaps this isn't the right spot?" suggested Charlie.

"It is a ledge, I know."

"Don't be too sure," and his comrade threw out the earth as fast as Sandy could loosen it with his pick.

But Sandy was right. About three feet below the surface was a ledge of rock which might extend for miles for aught they knew. "All we've got to do is to shovel in the dirt again," observed the disappointed youth, in a low tone, as they rested from their labor.

Charlie picked up a piece of rock that had been broken off the ledge. "I'll keep this as a memento," he said, trying to laugh.

Something about the rock attracted his attention and he examined it closely for a minute or two. He glanced stealthily at his companion, but Sandy was gazing off across the lake. Mrs. McClure had already risen and gone toward the house. Charlie hesitated a moment, opened his lips as though about to speak, closed them tightly and with a quick motion slipped the rock chip into his pocket.

He jumped up and commenced throwing the earth into the hole as if his very life depended upon filling it. Sandy watched him a few moments and then turned silently away from the scene of his disappointment. After he was out of sight, Charlie stopped working and drew the piece of rock from his pocket. It was an irregular bit of quartz, with some dull red streaks running through it. He examined these streaks more carefully and then returned the rock to his pocket with a triumphant smile. He had discovered something if Sandy had not.

Returning the sods to their place Charlie followed Sandy to the house. The two worked side by side all the afternoon, but not one word was spoken in reference to the treasure. Sandy felt his disappointment too keenly. "He takes it hard," mused Charlie, in his room that night, "but——"

He drew out the piece of rock again and sitting by his open window silently pondered long after the widow and her son had retired.

CHAPTER X.

MR. JOEL SMITH IMPARTS SOME INFORMATION.

As the days passed their former cheerfulness did not return to the occupants of Southlake. Charlie found that the pleasant intimacy between the McClures and himself was lost, but whether by his fault or not he could not tell. Nothing had been heard of Ben Stearns or the two boys who had been his companions, and whether they were still in the neighborhood or not was unknown. The planting was finished and they went back to the wood-lot to work. Sandy had lost some of his enthusiasm in running the farm, and Charlie was evidently becoming restless.

"I'd like to go away for a few days, McClure," said Charlie, one morning in the latter part of May. "I sha'n't be gone but a day or two. I've got some —er, well some business to attend to in the city."

"Got tired, have you?" inquired Sandy, sharply. "Do you want me to pay you in full?"

"No, I'm not going to leave unless you want me

to," returned Charlie, gruffly. "Five dollars will be all I shall need."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Sandy, more pleasantly. "I can spare you better at this time than later on."

Charlie departed early the following day, and soon after he was gone Sandy and his mother had a visitor. It was a neighbor named Joel Smith, whose house stood within sight of Southlake. "I s'pose ye've heered the news," said Mr. Smith, leaning back in the chair Mrs. McClure offered him. "It's turrible naow, ain't it?"

"What is it?" asked Mrs. McClure. "You know we live so far from the village that we seldom hear anything that's going on."

"You ain't heered?" cried Mr. Smith in surprise, yet with the evident satisfaction that one of his kind feels when he is about to impart the latest bit of intelligence. "Why dew tell! Ezra Benton's dead." He leaned back in his chair still farther and nodded his head positively at his listeners' startled exclamations. "Yes, sir, he's dead. Was drowned night afore last. I was daown ter th' store last night an' heered about it. They was s'archin' for his body all day yesterday but didn't find it."

"Why, how did it happen?" asked Mrs. McClure.

"Waal, there don't seem ter be nobody 't knows much about it. Ezra's housekeeper, Mis' Collins, says he started off day b'fore yesterday arternoon, an' she kinder thinks he went across the pond ter hunt up that nevvy of his—Frank Carroll. He was dretful worried about Frank, an' the boy's father had been up the day b'fore ter see 'bout him, but had ter go back to Boston. Nex' mornin' Mis' Collins found aout Ezra hadn't got back, and she got scared and sent some of the men ter look fer him. They found his boat aout in the pond 'most full of water an' all but ready ter sink. They s'pose it sprung a-leak and that he tried ter swim ashore an' was drowned. It's turrible sad—and he was sech a nice man, too!"

"Why, I haven't heard anything that has startled me so for a long time," said Mrs. McClure.

"They are positive that he was drowned?" asked Sandy.

"Waal, it stands ter reason that if he wasn't he'd a been home afore now."

"That's so."

"It seems too bad," said Mrs. McClure. "He was such a splendid man."

"Fine man—so he was," rejoined Mr. Smith, rising from his chair. "But I must be goin'. I'd no idee I'd stayed so long."

"Don't hurry, Mr. Smith," said Sandy, politely.

"Waall, I guess I'd better be a-goin'," said the man, looking intently at the threatening sky. "It's goin' ter rain like suds, I s'pose, an' I ain't got no cover ter my wagin." He started in the direction of the road and then turned and came back. "There, I declare for 't!" he exclaimed. "I forgot my errant here, arter all. Ye know aour folks have been keepin' boarders every summer for a spell back an' they've commenced ter come on us this airly. All our rooms is spoke fur, an' yest'day wife got a letter from a feller down in New York city—a perfessor in some college there—an' he an' his darter wants ter come up here ter board. Naow we can't pos'bly have 'em, but wife didn't know but what you'd mebbe take 'em in."

"I don't know," said Mrs. McClure, doubtfully. "We never have taken boarders."

"Waal, waal, that don't make no odds," said Mr. Smith. "City folks ain't hard ter suit naow I tell ye. Here's the letter they writ, an' mebbe yeou can find room fer 'em somewhere. Naow I must be goin'."

Sandy made a trip to the village that afternoon and there the report of Mr. Benton's death was verified by his housekeeper, Mrs. Collins. Mr. Benton's wife had died years before and since then Mrs. Collins had taken entire charge of the domestic arrangements of the Benton house.

"I don't know what's to become of me, Master Sandy," she said. "I'm getting along in years now, and although I've some money laid by, it will not keep me in idleness. Mr. Ezra" (she never called Mr. Benton anything but "Mr. Ezra") "left no will and the lawyer says that his brother-in-law, Mr. Carroll, will be declared administrator of the estate. Mr. Carroll may be a good man, but he's got no heart. He's all wrapped up in his business and he will never think of me. I don't blame Master Frank much for acting as he has. Mr. Ezra told me that there was another son—older than Frank—but Mr. Carroll drove him away from home for getting into some scrape or other."

"Maybe 'twill not be as bad as you think," said Sandy, comfortingly. "He may want to keep the house open, and I don't see why he should discharge you and get someone else."

"Well, he's got a dreadfully fashionable wife, and if she should condescend to come to Tiverton

for the summer she would bring her own servants with her and there would be no room for me."

"Well, Mrs. Collins, if you do have to leave, come up to our house. We are thinking of taking a few boarders this summer, and mother will be glad of your assistance."

"Perhaps I sha'n't have to leave here," said Mrs. Collins, "and if I do I shall be glad to help your mother. Isn't it something new, your taking summer boarders at Southlake?"

"We've never taken any before," returned Sandy. "But the house is large enough and we want to raise all the money we can, for if Mr. Carroll is the kind of man you think he is he may foreclose the mortgage at any time."

"Oh, I don't know as he means to be hard, but he does not think of others; only of his own business interests."

Sandy went to the post-office and mailed the letter he had written to Professor Dwight, offering accommodations for that gentleman and his daughter at Southlake. Then, before returning home, he went around to the factory wharf, where a crowd was gathered about Mr. Benton's boat that the searching party had brought in. The water had been turned out and the boat raised upon the wharf, so

that it would not fill again and sink. Joel Smith was among the crowd and Sandy heard him speaking before he reached the wharf.

"What I don't see," said Mr. Smith, in his high nasal voice, "is haow on 'arth Ezra Benton ever took such a boat ter go aout in. Naow it stands ter reason that if it leaked very bad he must hev known it."

"What *I* don't understand," said 'Siah Perkins, the proprietor of the Tiverton Hotel, "is why they haven't found the body yet. They've 'sploded 'nough glass jars under water ter start a regular reserection, if the pond was a churchyard."

"You know I went out with the first party," spoke up Henry Nolan, the village carpenter. "We found the boat near the narrerist part of the lake, and I swan, I don't see why Benton couldn't have got ashore. By the way, ye'll all remember the big maple that has kinder hung cat-a-cornered over the pond for years—you know, 'Siah, down on the Duncan piece where we useter go fishing?"

"Waal, I guess I do remember it," replied 'Siah.

"Useter be a bang-up place for perch," suggested another bystander.

"Yes, so it did," said Nolan. "But you won't fish there any more, for it's gone over kerflop right

inter the water. Funny it went over so sudden, ain't it? The roots allus seemed ter have a good holt on the bank. I noticed it for the first time the morning we was hunting for the body."

Sandy had been examining the boat during the foregoing conversation. The thwarts were splintered and the oar locks broken off and the boat looked as though it had received pretty hard usage. "Does it leak?" he asked.

"Does it leak? Well, you'd a thought so if you'd seen it when we brought it ashore," replied Nolan.

"If it does leak," said Sandy, "I don't see where."

"Waal, I suppose it leaks in the bottom," said 'Siah, in a tone that was intended to be sarcastic. "'Taint likely to leak on top."

"But that's where it does leak, if it leaks at all, 'Siah," returned Sandy, coolly. "You just get this into the water and I'll venture to say she won't leak enough to keep her sweet. I know she's battered some about the sides, but it's all above the water mark."

"Naow, look a-here," said Joel Smith. "I seen that air boat full o' water myself."

"I don't care if you did, Mr. Smith," returned Sandy, positively. "You help me get the boat into the pond and I'll prove what I've said."

Nolan and 'Siah took hold of one end, and Joel and Sandy the other, and between them got the boat into the water. The crowd confidently expected that it would fill very rapidly, but nothing of the kind occurred. There it floated just as light and dry as when it was first built. The bystanders stared in amazement. "What did I tell you?" laughed Sandy, as he walked away followed by Joel. He had propounded a problem that the idlers of Tiverton, with all time on their hands, could not solve. How had the boat become full of water, as it was when first discovered?

"Waal, I swan ter man!" exclaimed Mr. Smith. "However dew you s'pose that boat got full o' water, Sandy?"

"I don't know, Joel; but I'm very sure that Mr. Benton never left his boat because it leaked."

"An' they hain't found his body yet," said Joel, shaking his head. "It begins ter look like foul play."

"Oh, I don't know," returned Sandy. "Mrs. Collins tells me he was dressed in an old business suit and did not even wear his watch and chain because they interfered with his rowing. Besides, he wasn't in the habit of carrying any great amount of money about with him."

"Waal, I d'know, I d'know. I heard of a man down ter Boston that was killed for forty-two cents an' a cigar case," and for the remainder of their walk Joel continued to cite, for Sandy's benefit, all the circumstances of the crime whereby the murderer received as a recompense the said forty-two cents and the cigar case and a life sentence in the penitentiary.

CHAPTER XI.

WHICH INTRODUCES MR. SILAS CHADWICK.

On reaching home Sandy told his mother of Mrs. Collins's fear in relation to her losing her position and of the invitation he had given her. "Yes, indeed, I shall be glad to have her," said Mrs. McClure. "I suppose Professor Dwight and his daughter will make me considerable work, and I've been thinking that while we are about it we might just as well take another boarder or two. If Mr. Carroll is the kind of man Mrs. Collins represents him to be, he may be rather hard on us unless we pay our interest promptly."

The following day Sandy went to the wood-lot quite early and mapped out a good day's work for himself. His thoughts kept time with his ax as the bright steel flashed back and forth in the sunlight, and the heavy "chuck" at the end of every stroke reverberated from the rocks and gullies. Showers of chips flew about, and at length one spitefully hit him a stinging blow on the nose. "Cricky!" he

exclaimed aloud, rubbing the injured organ vigorously and taking a look at the sun through the intervening tree tops. "It must be nine o'clock," and, glancing with pride at the trees he had laid low, "I think I've done a good four hours' work."

"I should say you had, my young friend, a very good four hours' work," said a voice behind him.

The tone was cool and patronizing, and as Sandy turned angrily about to see who had trespassed on the farm this time, he discovered the owner of the voice but a few feet away. The stranger was a large, red-faced individual, the most striking thing, or things, about him being a pair of flashily checked pantaloons and a heavy gold watch-chain, pendent from which were at least half a dozen charms. The trousers were light in hue, coat and vest plum color, and he wore besides a light spring overcoat and a silk hat set very much on one side of his head. A heavy red mustache adorned his face, and he twirled a gold-headed cane in his hand. The picture of a thoroughbred professional sport was finished by a cigar tucked into the corner of his mouth.

"Yes, indeed, very good work," repeated the intruder, as Sandy stared at him.

"I suppose you haven't noticed that sign over there?" interrogated Sandy sharply, pointing to a board nailed to a tree some yards away.

"Oh, yes, I have," returned the man, smilingly, "and a very neatly executed sign, too. 'No trespassing,' quite right—quite right."

"Well, sir, I expect that sign to be obeyed."

"Just so. A very good rule indeed. I presume you are Mr. McClure by what you say?"

"McClure is my name," replied Sandy, tartly.

"Ah, so I thought. Then you are just the gent I am looking for. I have come to see you on a matter of business."

"Yes?"

"The lady at the house directed me here—your mother, I presume?"

Sandy ignored this last, but inquired: "What do you want?"

"My name, sir, is Silas Chadwick."

"Indeed?"

"Perhaps you have heard of me, Mr. McClure? I am the owner of the famous stallions Ben Jones, Draco, and Little Rock, and also of the three-year-olds Black Bess and Marmaduke. My horses always win, sir."

"Yes?" said Sandy, for his visitor paused as though expecting an answer.

"And now, my young friend," continued Chadwick, loftily, "as to my business with you. I handle

a great many horses and I wish to find a large pasture in which to give them plenty of needed rest this spring and summer. I have been informed by your neighbors that you would sell that parcel of land called the south pasture for a mere nominality. Now, sir, I am prepared to offer you a good price for your pasture."

"Whoever told you that I would sell the south pasture for a *mere nominality,*" said Sandy, "or for anything else, gave you very unreliable information. I have no wish to sell any part of Southlake."

"Then suppose you lease me the land, with all the rights thereto, for—say five years?" proposed Mr. Chadwick.

"No, sir, I don't wish to lease it, either."

"Oh, come, come, Mr. McClure, do listen to reason, sir! This land is absolutely worthless to you, but to me it would be of some value. Therefore I will pay you a good price for it."

"The land in the first place is not fit for pasture. It is covered with bowlders," said Sandy, shrewdly.

"Ah, but there is a water-front on the lake that is certainly valuable to me. There are two or three acres of clear pasture at the southern end, nearest the road. That part I intend fencing in, and shall

keep my most valuable horses there. The others can roam at large."

"I don't want to sell," said Sandy, firmly.

"Look here," exclaimed Chadwick, becoming impatient at the boy's obstinacy. "Those thirty acres of land are not worth to you the taxes you pay on 'em. Now I'll give you seven hundred dollars cash."

"Seven hundred!"

"Yes, sir, and I'm a fool for doing it, but I've set my heart on having the place, and in the end I shall get it."

"Oh, no, not unless mother and I wish to sell, Mr. Chadwick."

Chadwick saw at once that bullying was the worst possible way in which to further his cause, so he cooled down at once. "Now, Mr. McClure, you will admit that seven hundred dollars is a good price for that piece of land," he said.

"I know, as the land is valued, that it is a good price. But it is worth more than that to me."

"Say seven hundred and fifty."

"No, sir. I tell you I don't want to sell."

"Oh, well, come up to the house and talk it over with your mother. She'll hear to reason, I know."

"I am sorry to tell you," replied Sandy, "that I haven't time to go up there on a Tom-fool errand."

"I shall talk with her, nevertheless," said Silas Chadwick, as he turned away. Sandy allowed him to depart in silence; but when he thought of this glib-tongued, flashily-dressed sport addressing his mother in his cool, assuming manner, he dropped his ax and followed toward the house. Chadwick was just raising his hat to Mrs. McClure when Sandy arrived. "Your son, madam, will listen to no reason," he began, recognizing the boy's presence with almost a scowl. "Now I wish to purchase your south pasture for grazing purposes, and have offered seven hundred and fifty dollars for it."

"The farm belongs to my son," said Mrs. McClure, quietly, "and he knows best what he wishes to do with it."

"But you lose sight of the fact, madam, that you are administratrix, and should dispose of the property to the best possible advantage."

"Perhaps you will allow me to judge in what way my son will be most benefited," said Mrs. McClure, with spirit.

"Oh, certainly, certainly, madam."

"Then I leave the matter entirely with him."

She closed the door in Mr. Chadwick's florid face, leaving him to settle the dispute as best he might with Sandy. The latter had perched himself

on the rail of the piazza, and was enjoying Chadwick's discomfiture. "It's no use, Mr. Chadwick," he said, springing from his seat and following the thoroughly provoked man to the gate.

"Don't be too sure, my young friend," was the calm reply, accompanied by an unpleasant smile, as Chadwick climbed into his carriage. "I shall call again, and perhaps we may come to a satisfactory understanding."

"Don't trouble yourself to come again, Mr. Chadwick, for it will be useless," Sandy called after him, as the high-stepping horse started down the Tiverton road.

CHAPTER XII.

CHADWICK'S LITTLE GAME.

As soon as he was out of Sandy's sight, all Silas Chadwick's calmness vanished, and he brought his whip down on the horse's flank with an angry ejaculation that savored of profanity. He was mad clear through, and, if no one else realized it, the poor horse did. Arrived at the Tiverton Hotel, Chadwick made some inquiries of its voluble proprietor, 'Siah Perkins, and gained all the information he desired about Sandy's affairs, and some other people's, too, for that matter; for when 'Siah once got his tongue loosened there was no telling how long it would run.

"I've been looking over Southlake," said Chadwick, carelessly, "and think somewhat of buying it."

"There! I sh'd think Sandy McClure would wanter sell, though I did hear he was determined not to," said 'Siah.

"I may buy it. Who holds the mortgage, did you say?"

"Ezra Benton did, but he was drowned a day or two ago."

"Oh, then the mortgage will go into the administrator's hands."

"So I s'pose. Mr. Carroll, Ezra's brother-in-law, is to be administrator."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Carroll? Not Henry F. Carroll, of Boston?"

"That's just the man."

"Ah, yes, thanks. I think I'll call on him."

Chadwick hung about Tiverton until evening, and then, ordering a carriage, drove off in the direction of Southlake. The departed sun had left just light enough in its wake to reveal dimly the outlines of objects. When Chadwick reached the south pasture he reined in his horse and cast his eye over the great field, with its many bowlders and long slope down to the lakeshore. He seemed in no hurry to drive on, allowing the reins to lie loosely on his knees. His eyes were half closed and the smoke issued from between his lips in little rings. So pre-occupied was he that he seemed not to notice a figure that approached the carriage from behind a neighboring bowlder, until a voice said: "Chadwick!"

"Howd'y, howd'y, my young friend!" returned Silas, rousing himself at the sound of the voice. "You're here, eh?"

"Yes. Have you been up to the house? What did you get?"

"Sass for my pains and a total refusal," returned Chadwick, cheerfully.

"Just as I thought, and I'm right glad of it."

"You are!" cried Chadwick. "Well, you are a softy, Carroll! I had an idea that you had more grit, even if you are young. What's this whipper snapper done for you that you should be willing to lose ten thousand dollars?"

As he received no reply to this Chadwick continued:

"You must have struck it rich since I saw you yesterday if you're so willing to pass a third share in this thing. It'll be a third of ten thousand, anyhow. Just think of that, my boy!" and Chadwick leaned over and slapped him on the shoulder affably. "Think of it. Plenty of money, no work, a fast horse——how does that suit you?"

His companion turned away with a shudder of disgust. "Yes, I'm glad we've lost——"

"Don't be too sure," returned Chadwick, angrily. "I'm going to own that place yet, and don't you forget it. You'll get over this goody-goody spell soon enough. I'm coming down in a day or two to close the bargain. Be on the watch for me." He

abruptly turned his horse about and drove back to Tiverton, leaving the other gazing after him in perplexity.

"Close the bargain in a day or two," he muttered. "What new rascality of Chadwick's is this?"

Silas Chadwick drove directly to the hotel, paid his board and livery bill, and took the night train for the city. The following morning he hunted up the office of Henry F. Carroll, on Congress Street. Although Mr. Chadwick was an exceedingly large man in his own estimation, in the office of Henry F. Carroll he was "sized up" at once and treated accordingly.

"Well, what do *you* want?" inquired a clerk.

"I wish to see Mr. Carroll, young man," said Chadwick in his most pompous manner.

"Oh, you do? Well, you just hold your breath until you see him, will you?" and the clerk returned to his writing again. Chadwick was furious. He was about to break out with a regular cyclone of wrath, which would certainly have assured him an immediate expulsion from the building, when Mr. Carroll happened to enter from his private office. "Mr. Carroll," said Chadwick, stifling his wrath, "I should like to speak with you a few moments, sir."

Mr. Carroll looked the man over, and recognizing him for what he was, was more than icy. "I am too busy to speak with you this morning," he said.

"But my business is very important. It is in relation to the affairs of Ezra Benton, your deceased brother-in-law."

"Well, step in here," said Mr. Carroll, reluctantly holding open the door of his private office. "Now, what do you want?" he asked, as Chadwick followed him into the inner room.

"The late Mr. Benton," began Chadwick, without further preamble, "the late Mr. Benton held a mortgage on Southlake Farm for sixteen hundred dollars. I am about to buy part of the farm—what they call the south pasture—and would like to take up the mortgage on it also."

"Well, at present," said Mr. Carroll thoughtfully, "I have not legally anything to do with it. The court meets tomorrow and will empower me as administrator. I know that Mr. Benton *did* hold such a mortgage on this Southlake Farm, and I think there is a month or two of interest now due on it. But as to selling the mortgage—Mr. Benton had confidence in the parties—McClure, I think, their names are."

"Yes, McClure," returned Chadwick, smiling

and rubbing his hands together. "Old friends of mine."

Mr. Carroll raised his eyebrows slightly, in token of his surprise. "As money is going now," he said, "the interest on this mortgage is very good indeed. At any rate I should wish to talk to the parties most interested before disposing of the mortgage to anybody. You say you are going to buy a portion of the farm?"

"Yes, I intend to take the south pasture off their hands. You see, sir, I have a deep interest in them. You have no idea what a hard time they are having, Mr. Carroll." Mr. Chadwick was visibly affected as he thought of the trials of his friends, the McClures, and blew his nose violently on a mammoth bandana, which was artistically decorated with pictures of horseshoes and riding whips.

"What have you offered them?" inquired Mr. Carroll, who was not at all affected by Chadwick's emotion.

"Seven hundred and fifty dollars, sir."

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Carroll, now really surprised. "You must want to throw away your money."

"Oh, no, indeed, my dear sir," returned Chadwick, with a deprecative wave of his hand. "I

want a pasture for my horses, and although perhaps I have offered them a rather high price as their land is valued, it is simply because I feel an interest in them."

"I should advise the McClures to sell at that price," said Mr. Carroll.

"There, sir," said Chadwick, "I wish you would just write a few words to the boy—Alexander McClure—and give him your opinion of it. Although I have long been a trusted friend of the family I should like them to have somebody's advice on the subject besides my own. Someone they can trust as fair-minded and unprejudiced."

"Oh, I will do that for you, Mr.——er—your name, please?"

"Chadwick—Silas Chadwick."

"Very well."

Mr. Carroll turned to his desk and wrote a short note to "Alexander McClure, Esq.," and took a copy of it in his letter book.

"One moment, sir, until I get an envelope for that," he said, going into the outer office.

He was gone but a moment or two, but it gave Chadwick sufficient time to remove from the book the page on which the letter had been copied. Then armed with the letter to Sandy McClure, Silas bowed

himself out of the office. He straightway directed his steps to a friend of his, a lawyer by the name of Snell, and with the payment of a certain sum obtained his assistance.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PLOT SUCCEEDS.

During the evening of Silas Chadwick's appearance at Southlake Charlie Norcross returned. Although he was rather silent and thoughtful, to all appearances he had kept straight during his short visit to the city. The crops were all doing well, and the day after Charlie's arrival was spent in hilling a piece of early sweet corn. But on the next day Sandy went back to the wood-lot to work. He had not worked half the forenoon when he was interrupted by the appearance of his hired man.

"There's a stranger at the house who wants to see you, McClure," said Charlie. "I left him talking with your mother about selling the place. I don't like the looks of the man. I think I've seen him somewhere before. I'd be careful how I had anything to do with him if I were you."

Sandy was somewhat surprised at the earnestness with which this advice was given. "Don't you fret," he returned confidently. "That chap was

here day before yesterday, and I gave him a good dose, I think. I don't see why he comes again. He wants to buy the south pasture and offered me seven hundred and a half for it."

"He looks like a rascal," said Charlie, as they walked toward the house.

"Well, there's one thing he's got to learn," returned Sandy. "He must keep away from Southlake." Silas Chadwick was walking up and down the path between the gate and the piazza. He smiled affably as Sandy approached. "Good morning, good morning, my young friend," he exclaimed. "You see, I am here once more."

"Yes, I see."

"You will perhaps remember that little business matter which we talked over the other day?"

"Yes, I remember it. But I am no more ready to sell the pasture now than I was then."

"Ah, my young friend, don't speak so positively. Now I have really fallen in love with Southlake. So much so, in fact, that as you would not sell me your pasture I have bought up the mortgage on the place."

"What!"

"Don't be surprised, sir. Don't, I pray you. I always win in whatever I undertake. Had you

known Silas Chadwick better you would have believed me when I told you this the other day."

"You have bought the mortgage?" cried Sandy, aghast.

"I have, sir. Or at least I shall get the papers as soon as the court grants the administrator of Ezra Benton's estate leave to sell."

"I don't believe you," returned Sandy.

"I shall soon make you believe me, then," said Chadwick. "The interest is three months overdue, and unless you will take up the mortgage yourself, I shall advertise the place to be sold at auction for what it will bring. I don't want the whole farm—only your south pasture. But if I can get it in no other way I'll buy up the whole place."

"I shall want Mr. Carroll's word for it before I believe that the mortgage has been sold," said Sandy.

"Oh, you do? Read that, then," and Chadwick thrust a letter into the boy's hand.

Sandy opened it and read the following, which proved only too surely the truth of Chadwick's words:

BOSTON, May 23, 18—.

SILAS CHADWICK, ESQ.,

SIR:—In examining the affairs of the late Mr. Benton, of Tiverton, I find that it will perhaps be bene-

ficial to me, as the administrator, to dispose of the mortgage paper held by the estate on that parcel of property known as the Southlake Farm. I have considered your offer and will accept it as soon as I am appointed administrator by the Probate Court.

Respectfully yours,

HENRY F. CARROLL.

Sandy returned the letter without a word. He saw at once that he was in Chadwick's power, and that the man would make the most of his advantage.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Chadwick.

"You seem to have all the power to turn us out of Southlake," said Sandy.

"There, now you mistake me," cried the man. "I don't intend to turn you out of Southlake if we can come to any satisfactory understanding. If you will sell me your pasture for what I previously offered—seven hundred and fifty dollars—I will allow the mortgage to stand and discount any amount which you may wish to pay on the principal."

"Let me talk with my mother a few moments," returned Sandy. Mrs. McClure was as astounded as Sandy had been at the turn affairs had taken. "What can we do, mother?" asked the boy.

"I don't see as we can do anything but make the best terms possible with this man. If he will

buy the pasture and let the mortgage stand we had better agree."

"Now that is a very sensible conclusion," Chadwick said, on being informed of their decision. "Suppose we settle this business as soon as possible, for I wish to get a building raised on the pasture by the latter part of next week. Your Probate Court meets this afternoon at two o'clock, I believe. If you will write a petition to the court to grant you permission to sell the pasture, I will drive over there with it and have the affair settled. You know the court meets only once a month." This request seemed reasonable, and Mrs. McClure wrote the petition, signed it, and then, at Chadwick's suggestion, Sandy added his name. With this paper in his possession Chadwick departed.

Sandy followed him outside. The boy needed sympathy. He could not talk to his mother for she was too near tears, so he sought Charlie Norcross, who seemed to have slipped back into the place he had previously held in Sandy's estimation. "You didn't agree to sell to that fellow, did you?" inquired Charlie.

"I had to, Charlie."

"*You had to!*"

"Yes. He had bought up the mortgage on the

place and threatened to foreclose unless we sold him the pasture."

"Bought up the mortgage! How could he? I thought Mr. Benton promised to let it stand and wait for his money?"

"So he did. But you know I told you yesterday that Mr. Benton had been drowned, and the property has gone into Mr. Carroll's hands."

"Frank Carroll's father?"

"Yes."

"And he sold the mortgage to Chadwick! The scoundrel! That's the meanest trick he ever did yet!"

Charlie threw down the ax he had been using and walked off around the corner of the barn. Sandy followed him after a moment's hesitation. Charlie had thrown himself face downward on the ground under an apple tree in the orchard and his form was shaken with a tempest of sobs. Puzzled over his behavior, Sandy turned slowly away.

Late in the afternoon Chadwick returned with the order from the Probate Court, allowing Mrs. McClure to sell the south pasture. This time Chadwick was accompanied into the house by Snell, the lawyer whose services he had purchased. Snell was a weazen-faced little man with small, sharp eyes

and a nervous way of looking back first over one and then the other shoulder. The lawyer brought with him a deed made out and ready for the signatures. Sandy read it over, and, being very familiar with the boundaries of the pasture, was sure that the deed was what it claimed to be, no more nor less.

"Witness, please," said Snell, in his high, rasping voice, after Mrs. McClure and Sandy had signed.

Charlie stepped forward and took the pen. Snell rested his finger on the document pointing to the place where the witness was to sign, while Silas Chadwick stood with his arms folded and head thrown back watching Charlie keenly. The witness after a moment's hesitation signed "Charles Norcross" with trembling hand. But both Snell and Chadwick retained their attitude. Charlie looked from one to the other a moment, then hastily added a third name to his signature, folded the paper, and handed it to Chadwick, who immediately placed it in his pocketbook.

Then without a word Charlie left the house, followed by Chadwick and the lawyer. In the yard Chadwick tried to detain the young man; but Charlie turned on him with an expression on his face that really alarmed him. With an exclama-

tion of surprise Chadwick quickly followed the lawyer to the carriage and drove away. When Sandy came out, the carriage was fast disappearing toward Tiverton; and down in the south pasture a man was already unloading some lumber. Silas Chadwick had allowed no time to elapse before taking possession of his newly purchased property.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEAD MAN'S TREASURE.

"If it keeps on like this all summer," remarked Sandy, as he stood on the farmhouse piazza just after dinner, "we shall have more hot weather than we know what to do with." He was speaking to Charlie Norcross, who sat on the step at his feet. They were taking their nooning; and when it was pleasant they usually spent the time after dinner on the porch.

"It *is* pretty warm for the first of June," returned Charlie. "And this spring you remember we were afraid that it was raining too much for the good of the crops."

"But it didn't hurt 'em a bit," said Sandy. "Fact is, I never saw them looking better than they do now. I believe we'll pick peas in fifteen days."

"And that sweet-corn is looking first rate. We'll have some to market by the Fourth of July," added Charlie.

They were silent a few moments, and it was evident that their thoughts were not wholly on the early peas and sweet-corn. Both were looking off across the fields to where the carpenters were busily working on some buildings in the south pasture. "Do you know," said Sandy, thoughtfully, "that those are the funniest looking stables I ever saw?"

"They are not stables," exclaimed Charlie, springing to his feet. "Look here, McClure——"

Charlie's sudden outburst was interrupted by the appearance of a hack that had been toiling along the dusty country road and now drew up at the gate. The driver seemed to wake from the trance into which he had fallen, and, climbing down from his perch, opened the door. "This is the Widder McClure's," he said to the occupants of the carriage. "Good gracious!" exclaimed Sandy. "It's Professor Dwight and his daughter."

"Professor *who?*" asked Charlie, wheeling round and staring at the hack.

"Professor Dwight. We are going to take them to board this summer. You know I told you that mother had decided to take summer boarders. Just go round to the kitchen and tell her they've come, will you?" Sandy stepped down from the piazza and walked toward the gate to welcome the newcomers.

The occupants of the hack had now alighted, and the driver was taking off a large Saratoga trunk and a small brass bound traveling case that had been strapped on the rack behind. Professor Dwight was an elderly gentleman with gray side whiskers and a very pleasant face. He stepped forward and held out his hand to Sandy. "Mr. McClure, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. This is Professor Dwight? Happy to meet you, sir."

"My daughter, Mr. McClure."

Miss Dwight turned toward Sandy and shook hands in as hearty a manner as had her father. She was a nice-looking young woman, not strikingly beautiful, but with well-formed features that showed considerable character. Her smile was as pleasant as the professor's, and, in fact, her look and manner was much like his. Sandy decided that she must be at least twenty-one or two. "Come right this way," said Sandy, turning toward the house. "Mother has had your rooms in readiness for a day or two. We thought this hot weather would drive you away from the city."

Mrs. McClure met them at the door, and Sandy followed Charlie into the garden. "Quite a pretty girl, that Miss Dwight," he said.

"I didn't get a look at her face. Kind of old, isn't she?"

"Oh, I guess not. About twenty-one or two, I should judge. I think I shall like her. The professor appears very pleasant, too." But Charlie seemed to have very little to say regarding the newcomers.

"Now, Mrs. McClure, we want you to take us right into the family," said Miss Dwight brightly, after she had changed her traveling dress and come down stairs again. "Don't set another table for us, but let us just be homelike."

"Oh, you may have your meals with us if you like," replied Mrs. McClure. "Our hired man eats with us, but then he is a gentleman born and bred, and you would never know that he was a farm hand."

"I shall like Southlake Farm," said Professor Dwight to his daughter as they sat on the piazza that first afternoon.

"I hope you will, papa, I am sure."

"Yes, I know I shall. Just look at those rocks off yonder;" and the professor pointed toward the northern shore of South Lake. "I shall be able to get some fine specimens from them, I have no doubt. You saw that all my tools were packed, did you not?"

"Every one."

"Ah, I shall have some fine times roaming over the place," continued the professor. "Mrs. McClure tells me that there are four hundred acres here, but that they have just sold one piece of about thirty acres. The new owner is putting up some buildings over there."

"Yes, that is the only blot on the beauty of the scene," said his daughter, gazing dreamily across the intervening fields toward the sparkling waters of the lake. "It seems so quiet and peaceful—all but that. I wish they didn't have to build houses out here."

"What, would you have the natives live in the woods?" asked the professor.

"Yes, that's where the natives should live," was the laughing reply.

"I guess I'd better wait until you all get through, hadn't I?" asked Charlie Norcross of Sandy when tea time drew near.

"Goodness, no!" returned Sandy. "What's the matter, anyway, Charlie? I really believe you're afraid to meet this young lady. I didn't know you were so diffident before."

"Well, I'm in for it, I suppose," returned Charlie.

When he entered the little room Mrs. McClure

always used for a dining-room in the summer, Miss Dwight sat directly opposite the door. She raised her eyes to the young man's face as he entered, and there flashed across her own a look of surprise and pleasure. But it immediately disappeared as Mrs. McClure introduced the hired man: "Mr. Norcross, Miss Dwight and Professor Dwight."

Charlie bowed, and his handsome face flushed a little with embarrassment. But he recovered his self-possession before the meal was over, and conversed with both the professor and his daughter in his usual interesting and lively manner.

"If this is a sample of New England farm hands," thought the professor, "I am surprised. Why, the man is college educated, I'm almost sure." In fact, after he "woke up," as Sandy termed it, Charlie really surpassed himself. He quoted poetry with Miss Dwight, and Latin verse with the professor. He talked art and music, and at last, at their urgent request, he opened the melodeon and sang—something he had not done before for a month. The farmhouse seemed to take on again its former air of cheerfulness. The professor roamed over the place by day and Miss Dwight sat in a hammock that Sandy slung for her on the piazza and read or sewed, with an occasional brisk walk to the village.

About a week after the boarders arrived Sandy one evening remained at the barn quite late attending to one of the horses that had been ailing for a day or two. While returning to the house he caught sight of two figures standing in the shadow of a tree near the house. He recognized them as Miss Dwight and Charlie Norcross. They were standing with clasped hands and were conversing very earnestly. Sandy's approach was evidently unnoticed, for as he drew nearer Charlie stooped and——

"Whew!" muttered Sandy, turning abruptly away. "Isn't that piling it on rather steep? Kissing her! And they haven't been acquainted a week, hardly. What will the professor say? He made his way around to the piazza by a more circuitous route and found Miss Dwight and Charlie both there before him, so calm and unembarrassed that he was almost tempted to believe that what he had seen the moment before was an optical illusion.

"Look here, Mr. McClure," said Professor Dwight one morning, "don't think me inquisitive, but I should like to ask how long you have owned this farm."

"Oh, I haven't owned it but a very short time," replied Sandy. "My father died only this spring."

"How long has it been in your family, I mean?"

"Father bought it more than twenty years ago, when he came from Scotland."

"Twenty years ago, eh? Yes, yes, that would be about it," said the professor, nodding his head. "Do you know that I had heard of Southlake before you wrote to me about boarding here?"

"Is that so? I didn't know that its fame had gone abroad," returned Sandy, laughingly.

"Yes, sir. It was, I think, some sixteen or seventeen years ago when I was teaching at Williamstown College. We had a meeting one day of the professors and some of the students who were interested in geology, to examine specimens brought to us by a gentleman whose name was McClure. Was it your father, do you know?"

"Oh, no, it was my Uncle James," replied Sandy, becoming very much interested.

"James? That may have been it. He informed us that the specimens all came from a place he called Southlake Farm. He had the best specimens of copper ore that I ever saw outside of Michigan. So he got those specimens from this place, eh?"

"Yes, sir," returned Sandy; and then with a little hesitation he told the professor about the unfortunate quarrel between his father and uncle and of the mysterious treasure of Southlake Farm.

"Well, well!" said the professor, when the story was finished. "That is quite interesting. You don't have any idea, I presume, what your uncle meant by what was written on the paper?"

"Haven't the least notion. I don't know whether he was crazy, or whether there really was something there and somebody got ahead of us."

"Let's walk down that way," proposed the professor. "I should like to see this south pasture."

"Oh, I'll go down with you. But if there were forty treasures there they would be no use to me now. The lot isn't mine."

"What! is that the part you sold?"

"Yes."

"What did you do that for?" cried the professor sharply.

"Because I had to. The fellow I sold to bought up the mortgage on the place and threatened to foreclose if I didn't sell him the pasture."

"*That pasture!*" cried Professor Dwight, becoming more and more excited. "Was he particular about getting that part of the farm rather than any other?"

"Why, yes, he was," replied Sandy, very much amazed at the other's earnestness.

The professor looked at him a few moments in

silence. "Young man, I believe you've missed your chance," he said. "I don't believe those are stables that fellow is building down there. If they are they're peculiar-looking stables. You just come with me." The scientist slipped his arm through Sandy's and drew him along toward the south pasture. They reached the fence which separated the field from the rest of the farm and climbed over. Sandy led the way to where Charlie Norcross and he had searched for the hidden treasure. The soil had been recently disturbed and part of the ledge lay uncovered. The carpenters were at work on the sheds a short distance away and Sandy noticed that Chadwick's horse was tied to the fence by the road side.

Professor Dwight stooped and picked up a piece of the ledge that had been chipped off. It showed the same dull red spots and streaks that Charlie Norcross had noticed in the bit he had picked up. "Look here," said Professor Dwight, in a low voice. Sandy turned toward him and examined the piece of rock. "Do you know what it is?"

"No," replied Sandy. "What is it?"

Before the professor could answer somebody spoke behind them. It was Silas Chadwick, who had approached unseen. "Ah, good morning, gen-

tlemen!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together, his face wreathed in smiles. "Fine day, isn't it? Examining those little specimens of ore, I see? We expect to get everything in order in a fortnight more. My assayer tells me that there is fifteen or twenty thousand dollars in that ledge."

"What do you mean?" cried Sandy, aghast.

"I'll tell you what he means," said Professor Dwight, holding up the piece of rock. "This is one of the best specimens of copper ore I ever beheld, and I have no doubt that we are standing just over a bed of copper!"

CHAPTER XV.

BEN STEARNS'S FIND.

On the day that Professor Dwight and Sandy made the discovery related in the last chapter, Ben Stearns had been hanging about Tiverton. Ben had not forgotten the treasure. Oh, no indeed! And although he had separated from his two younger companions, and had no portion of the paper written by James McClure, thoughts of the hidden ten thousand dollars still occupied his brain during waking hours, and at night haunted his dreams. The local authorities had forgotten all about his little affair at Southlake, or his connection with Frank Carroll and Jack Brian, so it was entirely safe for him to be about the village. In fact, the village authorities were too busy discussing Mr. Benton's mysterious death and other more recent happenings, on 'Siah Perkins' hotel piazza, to notice Ben. He was allowed to roam about at his own sweet will, for the deputy sheriff and all the constables held daily conventions on the said piazza to

decide what had become of the drowned man's body. Although the matter still furnished gossip for the village, Mr. Carroll had erected in the family lot a polished granite shaft "Sacred to the memory of Ezra Benton."

In the course of the afternoon Ben wandered down to the station where on a side track a carload of lumber was being placed upon a lumber-reach. "Who's that for, shipmate?" inquired Ben.

"For a feller by the name of Chadwick. He's building some sheds up here about three miles outside the village," replied the driver.

"Up in the neighborhood of Southlake Farm?"

"Yep. He's bought up a piece of the farm. The south pasture I b'lieve they call it."

"The south pasture!" cried Ben. "What's he buildin'?"

"Well, I d'no. Folks said he was goin' to build some barns, but he ain't doing any such thing."

"Say, shipmate," said Ben, after a moment's silence, "any objection ter givin' me a lift up that way when you go?"

"None in the least, if you'll give me a lift with the lumber," returned the man.

"All right," said Ben, to whom time was nothing just at present, and he took off his coat and went to work.

It was six o'clock before the load of lumber arrived at its destination. The workmen were picking up their tools and preparing to leave. Ben and the driver of the lumber-reach threw off the boards as quickly as possible. "Goin' back?" inquired the driver, after the last board was off and he had climbed up to his seat.

"No, I'm going up the road farther," answered Ben. He turned in the direction of the farmhouse, but after the lumber-reach was out of sight, dodged into the bushes beside the road and waited until it became dusk. Then he left his hiding place and returned to the new buildings. He was not long in discovering the place where the ledge had been uncovered.

"Either somebody's been hunting for that treasure, or else they started a cellar here and struck a ledge. By jings! I wish I knew where that treasure was hid. I'd dig 'round all night if I thought 'twould do any good." He turned away and approached one of the buildings and tried the door. It was unlocked and he entered. Near by was a row of hooks on which hung some of the workingmen's old coats. But in one corner was a nice looking light brown overcoat.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Ben, taking it down and

examining it. "This is just about my fit, I reckon. What's this?" He thrust his hand into the breast pocket of the coat and drew out a square Russia leather pocketbook. He opened it eagerly. One compartment contained some folded papers. The other was filled with greenbacks. "Glory!" muttered Ben. "A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush, I've heard. I can't find this 'ere buried treasure, but I've got a little treasure here that I reckon I'll freeze onto."

He threw the coat on the ground, placed the wallet carefully in the pocket of his own ragged jacket, and with many a furtive glance around him hurried from the vicinity. He stumbled along through the darkness toward the shore of Benton Pond and came out at the place where he and his young companions had been surprised by Sandy two months before. Skirting the shore of the pond to the west he arrived, after a tramp of an hour and a half, at a little cabin back among the thick woods some distance from the water. The cabin had been at one time either a wood-chopper's or a coal-burner's hut, and Ben had patched it up and made it quite decently comfortable. There was only one room, at each end of which was a wide bunk covered with old bagging. On the side opposite the door was the fireplace.

There was no light in the old cabin when Ben entered, excepting that thrown by the fire sputtering on the hearth. Beside the fire crouched a figure which did not move at Ben's approach. "Hullo, Looney!" cried the sailor, addressing the figure. "Feel better? Why don't you have more of a fire? 'Tain't very cold, I know, but it's more cheerful-like with a blaze. And you are such beastly poor company, Looney!"

While he was speaking Ben had thrown some light wood on the fire from a pile in the corner. It blazed up brightly and revealed the interior of the cabin more plainly. Two or three rough-hewn blocks served as chairs, and in the center of the room was a rough board-table, made by the hut's former occupant. The table was set for the evening meal with a variety of cracked china and tin plates. The silent occupant of the abode placed a coffee pot over the blaze and stood up. The firelight revealed a man of about Ben's height, but with a form very much emaciated. The forehead was broad and white, except where a piece of the charred wood had snapped up and left a black smooch. A heavy growth of gray whiskers covered his face, and his eyes were vacant and staring. It was plainly evident why Ben called the man "Looney."

With a little assistance from Ben, Looney got the supper ready, and both sat down, Ben keeping up a running fire of conversation meanwhile, to which his strange companion replied only by vacant smiles and nods. Soon after supper both turned in for the night. Ben Stearns did not examine the pocketbook he had stolen until the next morning, after he and Looney had eaten breakfast. Then he brought it outside the cabin to where the old man was sitting in the warm sunshine.

"Look a-here, Looney, see what a haul I made," he said, opening the wallet and displaying the roll of bills. "That's a-goin' to keep us quite a spell, now I tell ye." Looney looked at him with a vacant smile and nodded. "I don't believe you know the valley of money, Looney," continued Ben, "an' I reckon I don't when I'm drunk. I dasn't take all this with me, so I'm a-goin' to leave it with you. I'll take a little, for we need some provisions an' I need some whisky most awful. Now you want to keep this for me," and he thrust the pocketbook into the old man's hands, after removing a five dollar bill from the roll. "Hang onto it till I get back, Looney," he said, and started off toward Tiverton.

The old man smiled and nodded and turned the pocketbook over and over in his hands. Some of

the papers fell out and he picked them up and looked at them with the same innocent curiosity with which he had examined the leather case. The papers seemed more attractive to him than the pocketbook itself, and his face lost some of its vacant, childish look as he examined them. The veins in his broad white forehead swelled to a painful tension as he sat there staring at the papers. The summer sun shimmered around him through the tree tops and a bright-eyed little squirrel whisked about without a sign of fear, so still was he.

CHAPTER XVI.

PROFESSOR DWIGHT SHOWS HIS INTEREST.

Professor Dwight was a peace-loving man, and for this reason, on the morning he and Sandy made their discoveries in the south pasture, he almost dragged his young friend away from Chadwick's vicinity. The boy for a few moments was almost beside himself with rage. The sight of Silas Chadwick's smiling, malicious face, and the thought of how he had been cheated in selling the south pasture, were perhaps some excuse for Sandy's ungovernable fury. Professor Dwight was as angry as the young farmer, only he displayed it in a more quiet manner. He had taken a great liking to the boy and felt deeply interested in him.

"How could he have found out about it?" cried Sandy, when they were out of Chadwick's hearing.

"I can't think, I'm sure."

"I'll bet I know," said Sandy. "The rest of the paper Uncle James wrote must have told just what the treasure was and those fellows probably got

Chadwick to buy up the place for this express purpose. I don't see any other explanation of it. He knew at the time that there was a copper-mine in this pasture and didn't want it for his horses at all."

"Of course he knew what was on it," said the professor.

"And he holds a mortgage on the place, too. I *must* pay him at once in some manner and get free of him."

"Does he hold the mortgage?"

"Well, Mr. Carroll has promised to sell it to him as soon as the court allows him to. I haven't heard whether the sale has taken place or not."

"This is Henry Carroll of Boston, isn't it?" inquired Professor Dwight.

"Yes."

"I am acquainted with him and perhaps if I run down and see him he may find some way that will be honorable to keep this Chadwick from purchasing the mortgage."

"No, I wouldn't have you do it," said Sandy, quickly. "I don't want to beg any favors of Mr. Carroll."

But the following morning, when Miss Dwight returned from an early trip to the village, she

brought a letter for Sandy. Sandy recognized Mr. Carroll's handwriting in the address on the outside and at once broke the seal. The inclosure ran as follows:

BOSTON, June 12, 18—.

ALEXANDER MCCLURE, ESQ.,

DEAR SIR:—Having been appointed administrator of the estate of the late Ezra Benton, of your town, I find among his papers a mortgage claim against the estate of John McClure, your deceased father, amounting to sixteen hundred and thirty-two dollars (including four months' interest).

According to the paper itself this interest is to be paid *monthly*, and I should like to hear from you in relation to the matter as soon as possible.

Respectfully yours,

HENRY F. CARROLL.

"Look here, Professor Dwight," said Sandy, handing him the letter. "What do you think of that?"

"That doesn't sound as though he intended selling the mortgage," returned the professor, after perusing it.

"But he doesn't even mention Silas Chadwick's name, and writes just as though he had been expecting to hear from me ever since Mr. Benton died."

"Yes, that's so. Have you got the other letter Carroll wrote?"

"Why, no, that belonged to Chadwick."

"Addressed to him?"

"Yes. It said that the mortgage was accepted and that he should have it just as quickly as the court gave Mr. Carroll power to sell."

"So it was addressed to Chadwick, eh?" said Professor Dwight, thoughtfully. "Do you remember how the writing looked? Was it like this?"

"Oh, yes. I recognized the address on this envelope as Mr. Carroll's from the writing which Chadwick showed me."

"Well, I know what I'll do," said the professor, entering the house. "I'll go to Boston and see Carroll. To my mind, there's something very peculiar about this." Sandy tried to dissuade him from going, but the professor was determined to have the whole matter made clear, and he started off at once for the railroad station. He passed Mrs. Collins coming in at the gate as he went out.

"Well, I'm here, Mrs. McClure," said the Bentons' housekeeper. "I knew I couldn't 'bide that woman's ways. She came up from Boston day before yesterday, bag and baggage, with four servants, an' they just about run the house now. So I up an' left 'em this morning after Mr. Carroll went to the city, and they're going to send my boxes up by John this afternoon. What shall I do first?"

Mrs. McClure was very glad to have the assistance of such a capable woman as Mrs. Collins, for there was plenty for both to do about the farmhouse. She had been thinking of taking another boarder or two, and had said as much to Miss Dwight. That very morning the young lady showed her a letter from a friend—Doctor Woodworth—inquiring for a boarding-place in the neighborhood of Southlake. "You can write to that doctor, Miss Dwight, and tell him to come right along," said the widow. "I've got somebody to help me now, and I shall be able to take care of him."

Toward the middle of the afternoon, as Sandy was working near the house, he descried a figure hurrying up the road from the village, and as it drew near he recognized the son of the proprietor of the Tiverton Hotel. "I say, Sandy, here's a telegraph message for you," cried young Perkins, breathlessly. "I've run purty nigh the hull way up here with it. The op'rator at the station sent it. What d' you s'pose it's abeout?"

Sandy tore open the yellow envelope and read the slip of paper.

Come to Mr. Carroll's office at once. 139 Congress Street. JAMES H. DWIGHT.

"All right," said Sandy to the curious boy. "Here's a quarter for you," and he hurried toward the house.

"By jinks! I wonder what 'twas abeout?" said young Perkins, addressing his question to the hoe that Sandy left just where he dropped it. "Sent him off in a terrible flurry. "Wal, I don't care, I've got paid both eends o' this thing, anyway," and he pocketed the quarter with a satisfied chuckle.

Sandy hurriedly changed his clothes, and, after telling his mother where he was going, started for Tiverton, and was fortunate in catching the 4:30 train to Boston. He was not very familiar with the streets of the city, and it was after six o'clock when he arrived at Mr. Carroll's office. Mr. Carroll and Professor Dwight were impatiently waiting for him.

"Mr. McClure, Dwight has been telling me a very strange story," said Mr. Carroll, after the professor had introduced the young man. "I want you to tell me all about it. This must be sifted to the bottom."

Sandy then went carefully over the whole affair, often stopping to answer questions put to him by both gentlemen.

"This Chadwick, then, you never saw until he

came to purchase your pasture?" asked Mr. Carroll.

"No, sir."

"Well, he is a rascal. He told me he was a friend of the family, and, although I was surprised that he should be a friend to any respectable people, I had no reason to doubt his word. Now, about this letter he showed you written by me. What was it?"

"The letter? Why, in it you told him you would accept his offer for the mortgage of Southlake."

"And it was addressed to Chadwick?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, I never wrote such a letter."

Sandy stared at the gentleman in amazement. "You didn't write it?" he repeated. "But it *was* your writing—just like the letter I received this morning."

"I can't help that," replied Mr. Carroll, smiling at the boy's astonishment. "I *did* write a letter, but it was addressed to you. In it I advised you to sell your south pasture for seven hundred and fifty dollars if you could get it; but I also told you that I should allow the mortgage to stand unless you wished Chadwick to buy it."

"I never received the letter," said Sandy.

"No, I know you didn't. I gave it to Chadwick

for you after taking a copy of it in my letter-book. I left Chadwick alone in the office a moment, and during my absence he must have removed the page on which I copied the letter, for it had been torn out. Then he forged the letter which he showed you."

"How could he? It was *just* like yours?"

"He may have got it very exact, but it is a forgery nevertheless."

"The scoundrel!" cried Sandy. "If we can prove this he shall sweat for it."

"Yes, yes, that's just it," said Professor Dwight. "But how can you prove it?"

"I saw that forged letter——"

"That's all right," interrupted Mr. Carroll. "But you haven't that letter now. No one saw the letter but you. You have nobody to corroborate your statement. I haven't the copy of the letter I *did* write, and I can't prove that Chadwick stole it."

"What can we do, then?" asked Sandy.

"Nothing. We have the satisfaction of knowing that he is a rascal, but we can't prove it. I'm sorry for you, Mr. McClure, but you haven't a word of testimony in the case. If we could only get hold of the forged letter we should have something to base a claim on."

"But even then," said Sandy, despondently, "he would own the south pasture."

"Unless we could scare him into giving it up," returned Mr. Carroll.

"Has he got a clear title to the pasture?" asked the professor.

"Oh, yes," Mr. Carroll said. "I quit-claimed for the Benton estate when his lawyer brought the papers here."

"Well, don't get too discouraged, my boy," said Professor Dwight. "Everything comes to him who waits."

"Works and waits, professor," corrected Mr. Carroll, preparing to lock his desk.

"Yes, waits and works; though I don't see what you can do in the line of work," said the professor.

"He can work that farm for all he's worth this summer," said Mr. Carroll. "And, by the way, you might keep my folks supplied with vegetables if you have any to spare."

"I shall be happy to do so," replied Sandy. "And about that four months' interest, I will send you a check for it, and six hundred dollars on the principal, if you will allow me to."

"Shall be happy to reduce the principal in any way you see fit, and at any time you can," said the merchant, good-naturedly.

They all went back to Tiverton on the next train, and Sandy and the professor arrived at Southlake about nine o'clock. The moon was shining brightly, and before they reached the house they saw that several men were gathered about the piazza, and that a carriage stood at the gate. "Here he is now," said someone in the crowd as Sandy hurried into the yard.

"Here, you young scoundrel!" cried the angry voice of Silas Chadwick, and he sprang down from the piazza and approached the boy.

"What's this crowd here for?" asked Sandy, pushing Chadwick to one side and stepping upon the piazza. "What are you doing here, Chadwick?"

"I'll show you!" returned Chadwick, his voice quivering with anger. "Here, officer, do you arrest that fellow!"

"What are you going to arrest me for?" inquired Sandy, calmly, as the constable hesitatingly approached.

"You needn't ask that, you young thief," returned Chadwick.

"What do you mean?"

"It's my unpleasant duty to arrest you, Sandy," said Mr. Briggs, the constable. "Mr. Chadwick accuses you of stealing his wallet."

"Yes, sir, my wallet, containing one hundred and fifty dollars and valuable papers!" cried Chadwick.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STOLEN WALLET.

Sandy was angry—too angry to keep his temper this time. He stared at Chadwick for a moment after he made his accusation; then he broke through the crowd, and, before the constable could stop him, planted a blow with all the strength of his muscular arm between his accuser's eyes. "There!" exclaimed he, "I've given you something to make a fuss about now."

The constable grasped the boy's arm and drew him back. "Come, come, Sandy, that's no way to act," he said in a conciliatory tone.

"You'll pay for this, you young wretch!" shrieked Chadwick, rising to his feet.

Sandy made no reply. He was ashamed and sorry that he had allowed his temper to get the better of him. It would do him no good, although perhaps it *did* give him some satisfaction to see Chadwick sprawling in the dirt.

"Let us understand this, Mr. Officer," said Professor Dwight.

"Why, that young rascal has robbed me!" sputtered Chadwick, before Briggs could reply.

"I didn't ask *you* for information on the subject," said the professor, contemptuously. "As I shall go bail for this young man, I want to understand the case."

"Well," said Briggs, still keeping his hold on Sandy's arm, "as near as I can make out from what Mr. Chadwick says, he left his overcoat hanging in one of the buildings down on his place last night. He didn't know that he left it there until this morning, and on looking for it he found it lying on the ground, and the wallet that had been in the inside pocket missing."

"And why does he accuse Mr. McClure?"

"I don't know. Mebbe he's got good reasons. *I* don't believe Sandy stole it, but it's my business to arrest him, and Mr. Chadwick will stand the blame."

"Come, are you ever going to take that fellow down to the lockup?" growled Chadwick.

"Not too fast," said the professor. "I will go bail for Mr. McClure, and he will be ready for the hearing when it comes off."

"Well, you see, sir, Judge Durgin is away, and he won't be back until tomorrow noon, and I can't take bail in his place."

"So you intend to lock up Mr. McClure until the judge returns?"

"Well, I don't want to, sir," said Briggs.

"Then don't do it," said Professor Dwight. "You know Mr. McClure—have known him longer than I have, and if I am willing to risk his honesty you ought to be."

"There ain't no use in your 'restin' Sandy, Briggs," said Joel Smith, who was among the crowd. "Every one of us'll stan' by ye. There ain't a man here that b'lieves Sandy McClure's a thief."

"Who are you, anyway?" snarled Chadwick, turning on Mr. Smith savagely.

"Who be I? Waal, I'm a free American citizen, born an' brought up right here in Tiverton, an' don't you forget it. An' let me tell ye, if ye'd sassed me as ye have Sandy McClure, I'd lick ye clean out'n yer boots!" Mr. Smith advanced on Chadwick with such a threatening gesture that the latter hastily retreated.

"You can do just what you please with that young whelp," he said as he prepared to drive away. "But if he ain't to court tomorrow noon I'll know the reason why."

"I don't want to arrest you, Sandy, and I guess

I can risk your getting 'round to court tomorrow, can't I?" said the constable.

"If you have any doubt about it, Mr. Briggs, you'd better lock me up," returned Sandy, coldly.

"Oh, I'm willing to trust you—perfectly willing!" said Briggs, hastily. He desired to be popular with the neighbors.

The crowd accompanied the constable back to the village, all but Joel Smith, who remained to shake hands with Sandy and declare that "nothin' on 'arth would make *him* believe that Sandy McClure was a thief."

"Do you mark my words," said the professor, after Mr. Smith had departed and they had talked the matter all over. "Chadwick is playing with fire. If he gets into law in this matter he'll get burned."

"Well, I know one thing," said Sandy. "I can prove by you all that I was here in the house from sunset last evening until eleven o'clock or a little later, when we all separated for the night. I have no positive way of proving where I was from that time until morning."

"If Henry Woodworth were only here," said Miss Dwight, "he would help us out of this."

"You're right, Mina," cried the professor.

"Why didn't I think of that? Do you suppose he would come up here? You see, Doctor Woodworth is as much of a lawyer as he is a doctor."

"I wrote him this morning that Mrs. McClure had room for him, so I presume he'll reach Southlake about the last of the week."

"Well, we can at least get the hearing put off a day or two until he comes," said the professor. "Don't you worry in the least, Sandy. We will all see you through."

By noon the next day the courtroom of the Tiverton Town House was filled with a curious crowd of villagers, who had gathered to see what would be done with Sandy McClure. All the idlers, including the village "authorities," had left 'Siah Perkins' piazza and adjourned to the place, and even 'Siah himself was there. Judge Durgin was a small-framed, florid man, with gray hair and beard. He was a type of the shrewd New England farmer, but with rather more education than his neighbors. Silas Chadwick was the last of the principals to arrive, and he brought with him Lawyer Snell. "Well, Briggs, what's this case?" inquired the judge, as he seated himself at his desk.

"Mr. Chadwick 'cuses Sandy McClure of stealing his wallet," replied the constable.

"Chadwick, eh? Who is he? Is this Chadwick in court?"

"Yes, your honor," replied Silas, stepping briskly forward. "The prisoner here has been guilty ——"

"That will do!" thundered the judge. "If I want any assistance in hearing this case I'll call upon you."

"But I—I——" began the astounded Chadwick.

"You're the plaintiff, aren't you?"

"Yes, your honor, I——"

"Well, when I want the plaintiff to speak I'll call upon you. Sandy McClure, will you please come here?" Sandy stepped forward to the rail which surrounded the judge's desk, followed by Professor Dwight. "Well, Sandy, you plead not guilty, of course?" inquired the judge.

"I do, sir."

"Prisoner pleads not guilty to the charge. We are—— Yes, sir, what can I do for you?" This last question was put to Professor Dwight. The professor and Judge Durgin held a few moments' whispered conversation. "Ah, yes. The defendant wishes the hearing postponed and Professor Dwight here offers surety for the prisoner. I will put the prisoner under a five hundred dollar bond."

"Your honor," said Snell, speaking for the first time, "I am the counsel for the plaintiff. We object to the postponement of this case."

"You do, eh?" said the judge, sharply. "What do you call a good reason for postponement? One that suits you, or one I consider sufficient?"

"One which is in your judgment sufficient, your honor," returned Snell, hastily. "We only wish to know the reason why this hearing is postponed."

"The defendant wishes to procure counsel," said Judge Durgin.

"Well!" snarled Chadwick, "if we have got to chase this through half a dozen courts and spend two or three months on it I'd rather drop the case."

"I suppose then you will be willing to show that the prisoner was not arrested maliciously," said Professor Dwight, clamly.

"What do you mean?" cried Chadwick.

"He means that you will have to show why you caused Mr. McClure to be arrested and were then so quickly willing to let the case drop," said Judge Durgin.

"We don't wish to let it drop," said Snell before Chadwick could reply.

"Very well, then. This hearing is continued one week."

Snell grasped his client by the arm and hurried him toward the door.

"One moment," said the judge, detaining them; "the next time you appear here, Chadwick, if you don't behave yourself better than you have today I shall fine you." The lawyer pulled the enraged Chadwick outside before he could answer, while the assembled crowd grinned broadly. The bond was quickly made out and Sandy was free to go and come as he chose.

"I hope you'll honor me with your company at dinner today, professor," said Judge Durgin, as the assembly dispersed. "My son is in your college and has spoken of you often, and," lowering his voice, "I want to understand this case thoroughly." He shook hands with Sandy and then led the professor to his carriage, while the young farmer went back to Southlake Farm alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WATERS GIVE UP THEIR PREY.

Henry Woodworth arrived at Southlake a day or two before the one set for Sandy's trial. He was a man of about thirty, with a pair of pleasant blue eyes behind his spectacles, and a cheery, breezy manner. "Don't you be alarmed at all, Mr. McClure," he said, after being made acquainted with the case and all its bearings. "If you're willing to trust the case to me, why, I'll do my best. But I'm no lawyer, as you know."

"You ought to be," said Professor Dwight. "You'd better give up doctoring and study for the bar. There would be no danger then in your experimenting on people as you do now."

"I'm very well satisfied as I am," returned the doctor, good naturedly. "Don't you mind what he and Mina say about my experimenting, Mr. McClure. I shan't experiment with you. In the first place, we'll get the case taken to a higher court, so that we shall have time to gather evidence."

"Gather evidence?"

"Yes, sir. Now, you see, you haven't very much evidence to uphold you as it stands. This Chadwick charges you with stealing his wallet. Now, to really prove that you haven't done any such thing, you must have testimony as to where you were during the night in question."

"But postponing the matter won't do any good," objected Sandy. "I want it over as soon as possible."

"Well, now, I don't," said Dr. Woodworth, "and for this reason. You haven't stolen Chadwick's wallet, but very likely someone has. Now, we want to find out who the thief is, and, more particularly, we want to find the wallet."

"I don't know as I very much care whether he ever finds it or not," said Sandy.

"Oh, but I am willing to wager that you *would* like to find it. Do you know what it contains?"

"Chadwick told Judge Durgin there was one hundred and fifty dollars in it."

"And what else? You repeated his exact words, or rather the professor did a few moments ago."

"Ah, I see," said the professor. "I see now. Chadwick said it contained one hundred and fifty dollars and *valuable papers.*"

"That's just it. Those valuable papers are what we want to see. Why do you suppose Chadwick should accuse you of being the thief rather than some of his workmen, Mr. McClure?"

"I don't know," returned Sandy, somewhat puzzled.

"Well, I can tell you," said Dr. Woodworth. "That wallet contained the forged letter, I have no doubt. Chadwick had probably not destroyed it, and he knows very well that with that in your possession you would 'have him dead,' as the saying is."

"Don't you suppose he has destroyed it?" queried Sandy.

"I don't really. And as long as that is in existence there is a hope that you may yet give the rascal his deserts."

This prospect made Sandy feel a little more hopeful, and without further urging he allowed Dr. Woodworth to take entire charge of the affair. On the day appointed for the hearing the doctor waived examination for his client, and Sandy was bound over to the next term of the criminal court, greatly to Silas Chadwick's disgust.

"Now you just go on with your farm work, McClure, and leave this to me," said Dr. Woodworth.

"We can't do very much, anyway, but wait for something to turn up." And after this sagacious decision, the doctor prepared to enjoy himself at Southlake. He was an ardent fisherman, and with Sandy's permission he spent half his time at the lake and the little brook which ran down to it from the hills.

But, although interest in Sandy's arrest quickly died out, the good people of Tiverton had much to whet their curiosity before the summer was over. The first was the announcement that a vein of copper had been discovered on Southlake Farm, and that Silas Chadwick had obtained the land on which it was situated for a mere song in comparison with the worth of the mineral deposit. The village people were surprised, and some of them really expressed sympathy for Sandy that he had not known enough to hold onto the land and work the mine himself.

The next exciting event was an attempt to rob the village bank, which proved, very fortunately, unsuccessful. The burglars had undoubtedly been novices, so declared the Tiverton *Bugle,* and had been chased by the deputy sheriff and one or two citizens, but without result. As far as could be seen in the partial darkness of the early morning, the

burglars were both well-built, though short in stature, and they gave the doughty deputy and his men quite a chase over fences, across fields, and at last distanced their pursuers and disappeared in the woods near the west shore of Benton Pond.

This attempt on the old banking institution caused considerable excitement for a few days, but the matter was forgotten in a still more interesting incident. 'Siah Perkins and Henry Nolan, while pursuing their favorite pastime of fishing, discovered the body of Ezra Benton entangled in the weeds at the bottom of the pond near the shore. It was near the middle of July when this discovery was made, and the body had been under water two months. Both the clothing and the body itself were in a very bad condition, so that the dead man could hardly be recognized. It was conveyed to Mr. Carroll's residence, and the coroner took charge of it.

Mrs. Collins was summoned from Southlake to identify the remains, and did so by the great seal ring imbedded in the swollen and discolored flesh of the third finger of the right hand. Immediately the body was sealed up in a richly-decorated coffin, and he who had lived so simply and with so little of ostentation was laid to rest with all the pomp and ceremony that wealth could afford. Henry Carroll

and his family immediately left the village, Mrs. Carroll feeling herself too delicate to remain in the house where a funeral had been so recently held. It made her nervous, she said. So she departed for Newport and Mr. Carroll came up to Southlake to make arrangements with Mrs. Collins to return and care for the old Benton house.

But the night of the very day that Ezra Benton was buried, Mrs. Collins disappeared from Southlake Farm.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

The sudden and mysterious disappearance from Southlake of Mrs. Collins caused the McClures considerable alarm. The old housekeeper had been greatly affected by Ezra Benton's death, and when the body was recovered her grief was renewed. She, with Mrs. McClure and Sandy, attended the funeral, and returning to Southlake late in the afternoon, Mrs. Collins went directly to her room.

The room was the one known as the east chamber, with a large square window overlooking the L roof, which was but two feet below the window-sill. This room had been occupied by Charlie Norcross, but since the boarders had invaded Southlake both he and Sandy had been banished to the floor above and Mrs. Collins had been assigned to this east chamber. At tea time Mrs. Collins did not make her appearance, and when Mrs. McClure went up to call her she declared she was not hungry and could not be prevailed upon to come down stairs. "Poor thing!"

said Mrs. McClure. "She takes Mr. Benton's death hard. It's not to be wondered at, for he was always kind to her and she had been in the family for years."

On the following morning Mrs. Collins did not come down to breakfast either, and again Mrs. McClure went up to call her. Her rap brought no response, and on pushing the door open she found the room deserted. The closet door was wide open and everything was in confusion. A light black handbag and Mrs. Collins's shawl and bonnet were missing. Mrs. McClure's cry of surprise brought the whole household to the room.

"Isn't she here?" cried Miss Dwight. "Where has she gone?"

"I don't know. Has anyone seen her go out this morning?"

"She must have gone out after I got up," said Sandy. "The doors were locked when I came down stairs."

"Could she have gone out there?" asked Charlie, pointing to the open window.

"On the L roof?" said Sandy, stepping to the casement. "Then how could she have reached the ground?"

"What could have possessed her to do such a thing?" cried Mrs. McClure.

"You don't suppose her mind is affected, do you, doctor?" asked Miss Dwight.

"Mrs. Collins always appeared to me to be a woman of excellent good sense," replied Dr. Woodworth.

"Let's take a look around outside," proposed Sandy, leading the way down stairs.

On the rear of the L, just under the kitchen windows, hung a long ladder, frequently of use about the place. As they passed it Charlie suddenly stopped. "Look here," he said, "this ladder has been tampered with. It's hung just the opposite from the way I left it last."

"And somebody has had it leaning against the roof of the L, for here is where the end rested," and Sandy pointed to two deep indentures in the yielding soil.

Professor Dwight went to where Sandy stood.

"Here is the footprint of a man's boot in the earth," he said, stooping down and examining the ground. "Only the heel is plainly visible, though, and it looks as though the man had rested his foot against the ladder to hold it steady."

"Why, this does look mysterious," said Dr. Woodworth. "Ladies of Mrs. Collins's age are not generally abducted—or is it an elopement?"

"What reason could there be for her strange behavior?" cried Mrs. McClure.

"You don't really suppose she has been kidnaped, do you, Doctor?" asked Sandy.

"Well, now, tell me why a woman like Mrs. Collins should leave a house in such a strange manner unless there was some power beside her own will at the bottom of it?"

"Well, I give it up," said Sandy.

There was no trace of Mrs. Collins anywhere. She had left no message. The marks of the ladder and the footprints in the ground were but slight clues. Mr. Carroll was forced to hire somebody else to care for the Benton house, and the mysterious disappearance of the old housekeeper was a nine days' wonder in Tiverton. Mrs. Collins had no near relatives, and of course she had a perfect right to go away if she wished. But she had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her.

Dr. Henry Woodworth, as has before been said, was an ardent disciple of that much-quoted philosopher, Isaak Walton. One morning toward the middle of August, and about a fortnight after Mrs. Collins's disappearance, the doctor shouldered his rod and, with a plentiful supply of flies in his book,

started for South Lake. This summer Sandy had purchased a light rowboat for the use of the boarders, and during their spare moments Charlie and he had built a little pier extending out into the lake. On his way to the boat the doctor stopped for a few moments and watched the work at the copper-mine. The buildings were finished, the machinery set up, and soon the great ore-crusher would be at work.

The doctor hastily stepped into the boat and pulled away toward the outlet of the lake. Occasionally in some shady pool he would make a cast or two, and during the forenoon landed three or four good-sized perch and a handsome lake trout.

"I believe I'll try the big lake," thought the fisherman, after disposing of the nice little lunch Mrs. McClure had put up for him. "Perhaps I may get a pickerel, and I can't have any worse luck than I've had here." So he rowed out through the narrow opening and pulled westward, skirting the shore of the pond. As far as Southlake bordered the pond the shore was low and sandy, with a high bank and thick woods directly behind it. The strip of sand kept the shadow of the trees from falling on the pond, and the doctor pulled on to the extreme western shore, where the trees grew down to the water's edge. Here, in the shade, he cast his line

into the black water, and before the afternoon was very far spent had added considerably to his string of scaly beauties.

"It seems to me that I never was quite so warm before," said the doctor, mopping his perspiring forehead after a particularly lively tussle with a big trout. "A drink of spring water would be remarkably refreshing. I believe I'll hunt one up, if there is any in the neighborhood." He stepped out upon the bank, and, leaving his boat tied to a tree-root which overhung the water, he started off through the wood. The trees and underbrush became thicker as he advanced, and he was about to turn back and seek some path easier to follow when a clearing appeared a little to the right. He pushed on through the bushes and halted on the outskirts to reconnoiter.

In the center of the clearing stood a cabin, built of logs with the bark still on, and having a roof of weather-beaten boards. The door, the only opening in sight, was on the side facing the doctor. Beside the door stood a block of wood, smoothed on its upper surface for a seat, and a little to the right a fire was smoldering on the turf. The fire was what made the doctor hesitate to approach the cabin, for it showed the premises to be occupied. After wait-

ing some few moments his curiosity got the better of his prudence and he tiptoed across the clearing to the cabin door. Removing his hat he peered around the rough door-frame. A moment later he drew back with a startled exclamation, but after a little hesitation stepped through the doorway and disappeared within.

CHAPTER XX.

AN INNOCENT SPREE.

Three or four days after the doctor's fishing excursion, work being a little slack about the farm, Sandy decided to take a holiday. Charlie Norcross was of course included in the good time, for Sandy never worked his hired man while he himself rested. The best horse he owned was curried down in a way that must have astonished the lazy animal, and with Charlie's assistance Sandy brought down a long unused two-seated buckboard from the barn loft and cleaned that in as thorough a manner as he had the old farm horse.

These preparations were made during the evening before, so that early in the morning they were ready for a drive about the country. The boarders had been invited to accompany them, as the wide seats of the buckboard would hold three comfortably. But only Professor Dwight and his daughter availed themselves of the opportunity, the doctor excusing himself on the plea of an engagement.

"I don't see what has come over Henry," said Professor Dwight as they drove out of the yard. "For the last three or four days he has seemed very much preoccupied and looks worried."

"He goes fishing every day," said Charlie.

"But for two days he hasn't brought home a thing," said the professor. "We would all have starved had we depended on the proceeds of his fishing trips for food."

"Perhaps his bad luck is worrying him," suggested Miss Dwight, laughing.

"I think he would have enjoyed going," said Sandy; "for when I proposed our spree to him last night he seemed very much taken with the idea; but when he found that we were going today he immediately said it would be impossible."

They rode on along the country road, through the village of Tiverton, and then beyond the village, and out of sight of the white church spire. Sandy soon turned to the left into an almost unused wood-road where the branches met overhead and the tall bushes brushed their faces. The odor of the pine needles, the drowsy humming of the insects dancing in the beams of sunlight that shimmered through the tree tops, the merry chatter of a bright-eyed squirrel that now and then ran across the path or

peered curiously at them from behind a sheltering bough—all united to charm and delight the pleasure-seekers.

A little further on they came to an arm of Benton Pond, across which the road passed. From bank to bank a tree had been felled as a bridge for pedestrians. As they came in sight of this spot they saw a man sitting on the log, fishing. As the noise of the carriage reached his ears, the fisherman began making frantic though silent gestures for the approaching party to keep quiet.

"That's Joel Smith," said Sandy, stopping his horse. "He must have a bite. I'll bet four cents it's either a mudturtle or a 'hornpout.'" He alighted from the carriage and quietly approached the eager fisherman. "What have you caught, Joel?" he inquired in a whisper.

"Hain't caught nothin' yet," returned Joel, in the same cautious tone. "But there's the 'tarnalest big critter a nibblin' at my hook you ever see."

"What is it?"

"I dunno, but I guess—there 'tis again!" As Mr. Smith moved his line the float bobbed under with surprising promptness; and, with a tremendous jerk which nearly sent him over backward, the fisherman threw the empty hook over his head. "I

swan ter man! That blamed critter's gone an' stole my bait ag'in. That makes the fourth time in ha'f an hour."

"I'll bet it's nothing but a snag," said Sandy.

"A snag!" cried Joel, indignantly. "You wait a minute till I git another whack at him. You'll see whether it's a snag or not."

Sandy walked away to the edge of the bank, where Charlie, who had also left the carriage, was stooping down, examining something on the ground.

"Look here," said Charlie, "here's a lot of beans. And I declare, some of them are sprouted!"

At his feet, scattered over the damp earth, Sandy saw a number of white beans—perhaps a peck. "Somebody's dropped his provisions," he said.

Just then an exclamation from Joel interrupted them. "I've got it! I've got it!" shouted the excited fisherman, pulling in his line hand over hand. If Joel had not been fishing with a hook and line strong enough and big enough to have caught the largest fresh-water monster known to the early ages of the world, he would certainly have lost the weighty prize which he now brought to the surface. It was a brown stone jug, holding about half a gallon. The expression of surprise and chagrin on his countenance was too much for the gravity of the

party of pleasure-seekers and they shouted with laughter. Joel was far too good-natured to be offended at their merriment, and he joined in the laugh himself as he threw his prize on the bank.

"It's mighty lucky for me that the thing didn't pull me in," he said. "It came purty nigh. It was jest over there a little ways that they found Ezra Benton's body. I don't wanter fall in here."

"This is full of something," said Charlie, lifting the jug. He shook it a moment, and then pulled out the cork. "It's whisky," he said.

"Let's have it," said Joel. "I'll get some use out'n the ol' thing. The whisky ain't no good to me, but the jug is." He took it and emptied the spirits on the ground. "Waal, I swan!" he exclaimed, as he turned the bottom of the jug upward. "If here ain't Jim Richards's 'nitials blown on the bottom. I reckon somebody bought some whisky of Jim, and was too drunk to carry it very fur. Waal, I'll take it back to him when I go home."

The party drove on, leaving Joel to continue his fishing. The road now wound along the lake-shore for some distance, and they had a delightful view of the sheet of water to the farthest western extremity, and the mountain beyond—Mount Bailey.

"Southlake takes in about half of that mountain," said Sandy, pointing to the wooded height.

"Perhaps there is a copper-mine in that," said Miss Dwight. "Who knows but what you will find the treasure of Southlake Farm yet?"

"No," said Sandy; "I don't believe there is any treasure in Southlake for me, excepting what is in the soil. I mean to work the place hereafter all that I can. As long as father lived in the expectation of becoming suddenly rich through Uncle Jim's researches, he did not succeed. But as soon as he settled right down to farming he got along better. If there's any treasure there it's got to be plowed out of the soil."

"Well, I want you to save a place for us here next summer," said the professor. "It will be some years yet before you get Southlake so well cleared that there will be no wilderness on it."

"Perhaps there will always be a 'wilderness,'" said Sandy, smiling. "I have been thinking that if we made a business of taking summer boarders it might be best to leave this wilderness as an attraction."

"I don't see why not," said Miss Dwight, with enthusiasm. "You might build a drive or two through the place, and have more boats on the lake."

"And an extension put on your house," added the professor.

"For which improvements you would need considerable money," put in Charlie.

"Well, I'm making some money this year. And as Mr. Carroll is kind enough to let the note stand——"

"The first kind thing he ever did," interrupted Charlie, ungraciously.

"I don't see why you dislike Mr. Carroll so," said Sandy.

"Well, I know him," returned Charlie, gazing off across the lake with a sullen look on his face.

"No, you don't know him," said Miss Dwight, softly.

Sandy looked from one to the other, but both remained silent. The professor had evidently not noticed the remarks. They drove along in silence for a little while, until Miss Dwight exclaimed: "See that tree in the water."

She was pointing to a great maple tree whose top lay in the pond, the roots barely clinging to the bank.

"Oh, yes, I heard about that," said Sandy. "That old maple used to lean out over the lake at an angle of very nearly forty-five degrees. But this spring, for some reason, it toppled over."

"See those water lilies growing near it," said Miss Dwight. "I wish I could get some."

"I'll get them for you," said Sandy, gallantly springing out and approaching the pond. The white-petaled flowers lay on the water some twelve feet from the bank, and near the spot where a limb of the prostrate tree branched off from the trunk. He carefully stepped out upon the tree and tried its strength. Finding that it would bear his weight, he crept along until he was in such a position that he could reach the lilies.

He had pulled up two or three of the flowers with their long, pipe-like stems, when he caught sight of a larger one, far handsomer than those which he held in his hand. But, of course, it was out of his reach. However, just under his hand lay a stick that had been lodged in the crotch where the limb branched out from the tree-trunk. It took some little effort to dislodge the stick, for it had in some way become tightly wedged into the crotch. But when he did get possession of it, he quickly drew the coveted flower within reach, despite the trembling of the old maple.

Then, with the lilies in one hand, and the stick in the other, he arose to his feet and ran lightly along the trunk to the bank. Hardly had he reached

terra firma, however, when, with a sudden lurch, the tree plunged into the pond, carrying a large slice of the bank with it.

Sandy sprang back as the bank caved and barely escaped being carried into the water with the tree. "You've heard the old saying about the last straw that breaks the camel's back, haven't you?" said he, smiling at his friend's startled exclamations. "I was just heavy enough to finish that."

"It's fortunate for you, young man, that you were not on the trunk when the bank caved," said Professor Dwight.

"'Siah Perkins and Mr. Nolan won't fish off that log again," said Sandy. "Here are your lilies, Miss Dwight. We'd better drive on, I think."

He handed up the flowers and turned to throw away the stick he held in his hand. But something about it caught his eye. It was about two feet in length and two inches wide. One edge was smooth while the other bore evidence of having been roughly broken off from some broader board. The board had been painted, for there were still faint traces of color on one side.

It was more the shape of the piece of wood than anything else about it that had drawn Sandy's attention. There flashed across his mind the thought

that he knew just where it came from. Unless he was very much mistaken it was a portion of the boat in which Ezra Benton was last seen alive, and which had been picked up adrift, half full of water and badly stove about the sides. How had the stick become wedged in the old maple tree? Sandy placed it in the bottom of the carriage and sprang in. He intended to investigate this conundrum at some future date, if only to satisfy his own mind that the stick was part of the broken boat.

As they drove along, the water continued in sight for a short distance, and then the road branched off to the right into the thick woods. "How long is Benton Pond, anyway?" inquired the professor, before they left the lake completely out of sight.

"It is considered to be seven miles from the factory wharf to the west shore, or 'hickory woods,' as it is called," said Sandy. "The north and west shore is almost a wilderness, and the timber is being thinned out but slowly. The march of improvement has not reached this portion of the township."

"No Indians round here, are there?" cried Charlie, in mock alarm. "I wish I'd brought a gun along. We may have to fight grizzlies or panthers before we get out of the woods."

"I've seen a wildcat shot just over there on

Mount Bailey near where we are going to eat our lunch," said Sandy; "but that was six years ago."

"There's a man in a boat rowing up the lake," said Miss Dwight, "and I do believe it is Dr. Woodworth."

"Now I wonder why he wouldn't come with us?" said the professor, gazing at the boatman. "He must be enjoying himself out there in the blazing hot sun. I'm glad we're not getting into the woods again, for I am very warm."

"How far do you suppose we have come?" inquired the professor's daughter, when they stopped for lunch just under Mount Bailey.

"I think about eighteen miles," returned Sandy. "But our house is only four miles and a half from here in a direct line. However, we have come the shortest way possible with a carriage. We shall have to start for home quite early," he added; "for the chores and milking must be done before dark."

"Sha'n't have to start until three, shall we?" asked Charlie.

"Well, that's the latest we can stay. Old Dick isn't much of a traveler, you know. I should like to drive you 'round through Lennox, but shall have to reserve that until some future day."

"Oh, I'll tell you how we can arrange it," said

Charlie. "I'll walk home over the hills and you can drive the professor and Miss Dwight to Lennox and stay as long as you like. I'll attend to everything."

"No, that will be too bad," said Miss Dwight.

"Don't break up the party," said the professor.

"Why, that will be all right," said Charlie, good-naturedly. "I sha'n't have to leave before half-past three, and Sandy will want to start for Lennox by that time. I've been to Lennox and know how pretty the drive is, so I advise you to go." They remained at the spot where they ate their lunch until mid-afternoon, and then Sandy drove off with the professor and his daughter, leaving Charlie to walk home. The young man started off immediately, but instead of following the path pointed out by Sandy he climbed up the hillside among the trees and great bowlders. "I've got time enough," he thought. "I guess I'll do a little exploring." He went on toward the summit of the mountain, halting occasionally to gaze off across the pond and the country beyond. He reached a little plateau about half way up the ascent, and as he glanced over the pond he descried a rowboat making toward the entrance of South Lake. It was too far away for him to recognize the oarsman, but he looked very much like Dr. Woodworth.

"I wonder what *he's* been after?" he thought. At that moment there was a rustle in the bushes, a dark form shot into the air from a bowlder above him and landed squarely on his shoulders, carrying him with unpleasant force to the ground. "A wild-cat!" was Charlie's first thought, and he struggled manfully to free himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

A PAIR OF AMATEURS IN CRIME.

Charlie was immediately made aware that no wildcat had attacked him. He was thrown face downward to the earth, and in a moment his hands were drawn behind his back and tied securely.

"There, I've got ye, ye sneakin' spy!" His captor rolled him on his back and Charlie beheld Jack Brian standing over him.

"Well, young fellow, I see you've got me," said Charlie, coolly, though rather surprised to see who his captor was. "Now, what are you going to do with me?"

"I'll teach ye not to come sneakin' 'round here a-finding out where we hang out," returned Jack, looking surlily down at his prisoner.

"I guess you've made a mistake," said Charlie. "I haven't been spying on you. I don't care where you 'hang out,' as you term it. I think you'll hang soon enough anyway if you keep on this way."

"What do you want 'round here if you wasn't lookin' for us?"

"None of your business," returned Charlie.

"Oh, 'tain't, hey?"

"No. Come now! have done with this foolishness, and let me up."

"Not if I know myself. I don't 'ntend to let you go an' bring the peelers down on us."

"What do you suppose I care whether they get hold of you or not?" returned Charlie.

"Well, I ain't goin' to risk nothin'."

"You're the biggest idiot I ever saw!" exclaimed Charlie.

"Mebbe that's so," said Jack, sullenly. "But I ain't a-goin' to let you go jest yet."

"Well, you'll have a picnic keeping me here, that's all I've got to say about it. Suppose you assist me to some place where there is a little more shade? If I've got to stay here, I want to be comfortable."

"I'll keep you till my pardner comes," said Jack, assisting Charlie to rise. "He'll know what to do."

With his hand on his prisoner's collar, Jack led him up a winding, rocky path, and allowed him to sit down under the shade of some tall bushes. "Hello! you're going to have another visitor,"

and Charlie nodded his head toward the pathway they had just ascended. Jack looked over the edge and gave a low whistle. The signal was answered from below, and Frank Carroll soon climbed up the path. "Who's this?" he cried, on beholding Charlie.

"A feller I caught spying around here," replied Jack.

"Who is he, anyway?"

"I'm your long-lost brother." said Charlie, with a smile.

"The dickens you are!" returned Frank, after staring at Charlie a moment. "I know you! Remember the tramp who did up Ben Stearns over on Southlake that day, don't you, Jack? This is the fellow."

"Is this him? What's he doing 'round here?" inquired Jack.

Frank repeated this question to the prisoner. "None of your business," was the prompt reply.

"Well, we'll make it our business," said Frank, angrily.

Charlie made no reply, and the two amateur outlaws retired to a little distance and conversed together in low tones. Finally Frank said to the prisoner: "I reckon you was doing something

that you'd no business to, or you'd be willing to tell what you wanted. I'm not going to let you go until I feel pretty sure that you ain't a detective and won't bring a mob of officers down on us."

"You're a pair of young idiots!" said Charlie, in disgust. "Dime-novel heroes, I suppose."

"Shut up!" commanded Jack Brian. Charlie rolled over on the grass, and, getting into a more comfortable position, prepared to "enjoy" his captivity by taking a nap. Frank and Jack remained seated not far from him, conversing in low tones.

"What luck did you have?" asked Jack of his partner.

"I shot a couple of squirrels—all the game I saw," replied Frank. "Did you get that corn?"

"Yes, and a couple of melons, too. I wish we had some ducats. I'm gettin' mighty hungry for bread."

"Well, I discovered something," said Frank.

"What is it?"

"I'll bet I know where Ben Stearns is."

"Is that so? Did you see him?"

"I think it was him," replied Frank. "It wasn't more than two miles from here—in those woods to the north. I came across a little cabin in a clearing, and outside by the door I saw a man just about

Ben's build sitting on a stump. I'm almost positive it was Ben—he wore that old brown felt hat that Ben wore, anyway."

"I wish we hadn't had that row with Ben," said Jack.

"You're right. That blamed old treasure didn't do us any good. We got along a plaguy sight better when Ben was with us."

"I wonder what those new buildings are over on McClure's place? I wonder if Ben knows about them?"

"Lots of good this has done us," said Frank, pulling a dirty piece of paper from his jacket pocket. "It don't help us any to know how much treasure there is. We don't know where it is."

"Throw the thing away. I'm sick of the sight of it," said Jack. "We got in a row with Ben over it. He might have it, for all me."

"Or me, either." Frank crumpled up the paper and threw it into the bushes. "I wish we could get in with Ben again," he said. "He's got a mighty nice little cabin—better than our place."

"Let's go down and see him," suggested Jack.

"Will you go?" cried Frank, jumping up.

"You bet. I'm about sick of this. We can't get anywhere, an' das'n't go near the village since we

tried to crack the bank. Let's try and make up with him."

"And leave this fellow here?" asked Frank, pointing to their prisoner.

"Why not? I'll tie him so he can't give us the slip while we're gone." Charlie was unceremoniously rolled over on his face, and a cord passed from the one which bound his hands to his ankles, and his feet tied together. Then Frank picked up his gun, and, followed by Jack Brian, descended the slope of the plateau below and disappeared among the trees.

"I am really getting interested in this," muttered the prisoner. "I should very much like to see what this convention which the boys are going to will be like." With this he rolled over upon his back and sat up. Putting forth considerable strength, he snapped the cord which bound his wrists. "By Jove, that hurt!" he exclaimed, rubbing his wrists. "Drew blood, too. Well, never mind." He loosened his ankles in a moment and arose to his feet. He stretched himself, walked up and down two or three times and then said: "I'm all right, I guess. A little stiff, though. Ah, there's that paper."

He stooped as he spoke and picked up the piece of paper Frank Carroll had thrown down. It was what he had supposed it to be, the first half of James

McClure's letter to his brother and which had been hidden so many years in the old secretary. "This will interest Sandy," he said, and tucking it away in his pocket he descended the slope and followed after the boys.

Charlie was very careful not to be discovered by the two he was tracking, but he kept them in sight or hearing for a mile or so. Then he lost them, but kept on at random until, after about an hour's travel, he suddenly came to the edge of a clearing. There was a cabin in the center and a fire was burning outside. "Now, I wonder if this is the place?" thought Charlie. He looked carefully around him to make sure that the two boys were not in sight. Then he stooped down, concealing himself in the bushes, and awaited developments. In a few moments he was very much surprised to see a woman come out of the cabin. But his astonishment knew no bounds when, as the woman turned toward him, he recognized Mrs. Collins!

What was Ezra Benton's housekeeper doing here, in Ben Stearns's cabin? Why had she gone off so mysteriously if it was of her own free will, as it certainly must have been, as her movements were now not restrained in any way?

"It's a mystery beyond me!" he muttered, still gazing at the woman.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

Sandy McClure, meanwhile, drove his little party of excursionists around to Lennox as he had promised, and back to Southlake by the way of Tiverton. He reached the village about sunset and stopped a few moments at the factory wharf. Mr. Benton's boat, the one that had been found adrift, was housed under an old shed on the wharf, and leaving the carriage Sandy took the piece of broken board he had found and went into the shed. The boat had not been repaired, and, as he surmised, the piece of wood fitted exactly into a broken place on one side of the craft.

"Now, how could the boat have been broken up there by the maple and Mr. Benton's body been found two miles or more away?" he asked himself. "Will somebody please tell me that?"

There really was nobody to answer his query, however. Tiverton people—even the crowd of philosophers usually to be found upon 'Siah Perkins's

piazza, excepting when something of great moment occurred in some other part of the village—had seen Ezra Benton's body interred in the village churchyard, and that was enough for them. They were not asking questions, or answering them, about a matter which had been settled to their entire satisfaction long ago.

To Sandy, however, the mill-owner's death had never seemed quite clear. He had spoken to no person regarding the doubts which insistently returned to his mind; nevertheless, he wished that several details connected with the drowning had been more satisfactorily explained. Even the finding of the body and its identification did not wholly satisfy him. Why had Mr. Benton tried to swim ashore from a boat that did not leak? And how came the boat nearly full of water if—as Sandy very well knew—it did not leak? And how was it the mill-owner had been drowned while swimming ashore in a very narrow portion of the pond? The weather had not been very cold, and, old as he was, Ezra Benton was known to be a vigorous swimmer.

Sandy remembered that he had started that fatal afternoon to try and find his runaway nephew, Frank Carroll. Was it possible that the misguided boy, and his companions, Jack Brian and Ben

Stearns, knew anything regarding the mill-owner's death which the public did not? He shuddered to think of this; suppose that trio of ne'er-do-wells had had something to do with the old man's death?

And then, how had his rowboat become broken? And how had that bit of the thwart been wedged into the crotch of the old maple? Could it be possible that, after having been abandoned by Ezra Benton, the boat had floated beneath the leaning maple just at the moment the tree fell into the pond? If this had occurred, the broken thwarts and generally battered condition of the boat, and its being later found almost submerged floating about the pond, was explained.

But then, if *that* were the case (and the bit of plank he had found that day pointed strongly to it), *why* had Ezra Benton abandoned the boat and allowed it to float away toward the maple? For the body of the mill-owner was found beside the log bridge, fully two miles from the leaning maple-tree. The mystery was only made the deeper by his discovery, and he walked slowly back to the carriage with the bit of plank in his hand and a puzzled frown upon his brow. But, if he could get no light on this perplexing question, he was destined to gain some little information of a quite surprising

nature on his way home. The buckboard overtook Joel Smith as it rolled out of the village on the road to Southlake, and Sandy invited the fisherman to take Charlie's empty seat, fish and all.

"Yes, I hooked quite a mess after I caught that jug," Joel said, in reply to a remark by the professor. "An', by the way, that jug *did* belong ter Jim Richards. I stopped in there on my way back, an' he says he remembers selling it to a feller abeout two months ago. He didn't know the man's name, but had seen him hangin' 'round the village. He probably was too full ter carry it."

When the party reached Southlake, Charlie Norcross had arrived but a few moments before them.

"I got delayed and missed my way," he said, by way of explanation.

"You might just as well have kept on with us then," said Sandy. "What kept you?"

"Wildcats," returned Charlie, laughing. "Here's the traces I found of them," and he thrust a crumpled paper into Sandy's hand.

"What's this?" inquired the young farmer, turning the paper over in his hand. "Why, is it—well, I *am* astonished! Where did you get it?"

"I picked it up on Mount Bailey," returned Charlie.

"It's the rest of Uncle Jim's letter. Those fellows must have dropped it. But it won't do me any good now."

"Just piece it together and see what you can make out of it," suggested Charlie.

After tea Sandy hunted up the piece of the letter he had preserved, and, pasting the edges together, read it entire, to the following effect:

BROTHER JOHN:—I call you brother still, although you drive me from your house. I do not blame you. Perhaps the provocation is sufficient. I realize more now than ever before what you have endured for me, and as reparation, in part at least, I will leave you to enjoy alone the fruits of my investigations. The vein which I have discovered will be worth at least two thousand pounds. This has come through years of toil and research. The copper deposit is situated thus: In south pasture 15 or 20 yards from bowlder marked with a cross thus X, on direct line with pine stump. God bless and prosper you. JAMES M'CLURE.

"Well, there's some little satisfaction in reading the whole of this letter," said Sandy, with a sigh. "But I'd give up the old treasure twice over if I had all of Southlake back again."

"Perhaps you will before long," said Charlie, mysteriously, and immediately walked away.

"I wonder what he means?" queried Sandy. But as Charlie had already gone to his room his re-

mark was not explained. During the next few days Sandy was considerably nonplused by discovering Charlie, the doctor, and Miss Dwight in frequent and mysterious conclaves. At his approach they always stopped talking, and Sandy became exceedingly curious to know what his three friends were plotting. However, Joel Smith came over one day with the latest bit of news, which quite drove their strange actions out of Sandy's mind.

"Have ye heered abeout th' time they're havin' daown in th' village?"

"No, what's going on?" inquired Sandy.

"Waal, sir, they're a' havin' the 'tarnalist funny things happenin' daown there that ever I heered on."

"Let's hear about it."

"Yer know that Carroll 'twas p'inted administrator of Ezra Benton's property? Waal, since the fun'ral the ol' Benton house has been under 'Mandy Briggs's charge—she's Jim Briggs's sister. Miss Briggs was a-tellin' her brother more'n a week ago that she heered strange noises about the house nights and now she declares the place is ha'nted and she won't stay there no longer. So the house is going to be shut up, fur nobody'll take care on't."

"Pooh!" said Sandy. "Rats, most probably."

"Waal, I dunno, I dunno," returned Joel. "*I* don't say 't I b'lieve in sperits ha'ntin' places where they've lived on 'arth, but they dew say this is Ezra Benton's ghost."

"Where's John, Mr. Benton's coachman?" asked Sandy.

"Oh, *he's* moved out, too, long ago. Said he couldn't stand it and boards daown ter 'Siah's house."

"Well, it would take an exceedingly lively ghost to make me leave," observed Sandy, decidedly.

"I never see one," said Joel, reflectively, "but I've heered ol' Ma'am Perkins, 'Siah's mother, tell abeout one 't uster ha'nt the ridge road toward Lennox."

"That's all foolishness," interrupted Sandy. "It stands to reason that there is no such thing as a ghost. Miss Briggs probably got scared by the rats in the old house. They must be pretty thick there." Sandy told the folks at tea that evening about the ghostly visitants reported at the old Benton house. Charlie seemed to be immensely amused over the affair. "I'll stump you to go down there and sleep in the haunted house some night, Sandy," he said.

"No, I won't either," returned Sandy, promptly. "I don't believe in ghosts, but I don't intend to have

my disbelief shaken if there should happen to be any there."

A general laugh followed this declaration, and Dr. Woodworth asked: "Did you say that the coachman and the woman who has been attending to the house have both left?"

"So Joel says."

"Pretty badly scared, were they?" inquired Charlie.

"So I should think."

"Well, we'll go down and interview the specter some night," said Charlie. "Will you go, Doctor?"

"Yes, indeed. Perhaps if we could catch it I could study its anatomy. I've never had the pleasure of dissecting a ghost."

"I shall join your party, too, Mr. Norcross," said Miss Dwight.

"None of you could keep still long enough to allow the ghost a chance to come out of his hole," put in the professor.

"Well, when we go," said Sandy, "I shall arm myself with some toasted cheese and a trap, and I'll wager that I shall catch more rats than the rest of you do ghosts." Sandy arose from the table after this remark and went out to lock up the cattle for the night. As he turned away from the barn

he heard a noise down toward the lower end of the cornfield. It sounded like the breaking of a stick and he listened a few moments to hear if it would be repeated. After a little silence he heard a faint rustling in the corn, and, as it was too dark for him to perceive anything at such a distance, he hurried around the edge of the cornfield to the lower end. Here he discovered two figures among the corn stalks and recognized Frank Carroll and Jack Brian.

"Aha, my friends!" thought Sandy. "I think I'll have you this time, sure." The two boys had a bag which was already nearly filled with ears of corn, and Sandy saw that it was too late for him to return to the house for assistance. So he decided to follow the young marauders to their place of refuge and then return for help.

"We've got all we can carry, Jack," said Frank Carroll, in a cautious tone. "We sha'n't have to come again for some time, thank goodness."

"I was mighty afraid somebody up ter the house would hear us," rejoined Jack. "That rail broke with me as I climbed over the fence and made such a racket."

"Well, come along."

The bag of corn was lifted over the fence and the two boys started across the fields, unconscious that

behind them a figure was following, dodging from bowlder to bowlder, but keeping them well in view.

"I'll just find out where they are staying and then I'll let Mr. Carroll know," muttered the pursuer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE "HIDE-OUT."

The boys crossed two or three fields and then struck off toward the hilly portion of the farm. Sandy followed them as closely as he dared, but in climbing over a fence he was more intent on the boys ahead of him than on where he stepped. The top rail of the fence suddenly rolled over and Sandy was sent headlong to the ground, the loosened rail following with a great clatter. The marauders dropped the bag of corn and ran back to the fence, and before Sandy could recover himself they were upon him. He struggled to get upon his feet, but his captors held him to the ground, just as Jack had held Charlie Norcross on a former occasion.

"Got a line, Jack?" asked Frank, who was putting forth all the strength he possessed to hold the captive's hands.

"Yes. Here 'tis," replied Jack Brian, producing a cord from his pocket.

"Now tie him fast. We don't want him to escape as that other fellow did."

"Who is he?" asked Jack, when he had tied his prisoner's hands to his satisfaction.

Frank rolled the prostrate captive over on his back. "Why, it's McClure himself!" he exclaimed.

"That's just who it is," said Sandy, looking up at the two boys. "What have you been stealing my corn for?"

"Necessity, my friend," returned Frank, airily.

"What shall we do with him?" asked Jack.

"If you will take my advice you'll let me up and carry that corn back," said Sandy. "Seems to me I'd find something better to do than stealing for my living."

"Keep your advice till it's called for," returned Frank.

But Sandy paid no attention to the command. "You fellows had better go home," he said. "What will you do when winter comes? You can't live here in the woods then. You've got a good home to go to, Frank, and Jack's father would be glad to have him return, I have no doubt. Come, let me up and untie my hands, and I'll take back the corn myself and nobody shall be the wiser. Only you fellows must promise to go home."

"Oh, you won't say anything about it, hey?" said Jack Brian. "What do yer take us for, anyway? There hain't no hayseed in our hair, is there, Frank?"

"I guess not," returned Frank. "We prize our liberty too highly to lose it now."

"Your liberty!" exclaimed Sandy, greatly disgusted at the foolish fellows. "You had both better give up reading dime novels and try to live some sort of respectable, decent lives."

"Come, give us less sass!" said Jack. "What shall we do with him, Frank?"

"I'll show you. He thinks it would be so nice to be tied up at home we'll keep him tied up a little while. Let's take him along with us."

"But he'll find the way to our hide-out."

"Oh, I'll fix that. We'll blindfold him, and I'll bet it will take him a week of Sundays to find his way there again."

"But he'll bring a crowd and they'll just about scour the region to find us."

"Let 'em come," said Frank. "They can't get at us, for we can shoot every man who approaches the camp. Come on." Rather unwillingly Jack assisted in raising Sandy to his feet. A handkerchief was found in the captive's pocket, which they bound

over his eyes so tightly that it was impossible for him to see. Then Jack raised the bag of corn to his shoulder and started off immediately, leaving Frank to follow with the prisoner.

If you have ever tried walking blindfolded even with some one leading you, you can perhaps understand the unpleasant sensations which Sandy endured for the next hour. Although he was very familiar with the country over which he was led, he might just as well have been set down in the heart of Africa as far as this knowledge served him. Over rocks, through bushes, up and down hillsides he was led, and at last was dragged by his captors through a low passage. And all this with his hands tied tightly behind him.

At length they seemed to have arrived at their destination. Sandy was allowed to stand up, the handkerchief was removed from his eyes, and he found himself in the strangest place he had ever seen. It was an oblong apartment, seemingly hollowed out of the solid rock, with a sanded floor and with a fire burning in one end. The wall nearest the fire was composed of thick vines, at one corner of which was a small opening. The opposite end of the cavern was shrouded in darkness, so that it was impossible to determine its depth. A great pile of

pine branches lay at one side and two army blankets were folded up near the fire. This cave, then, was the rendezvous of the young outlaws, but where it could be situated Sandy did not know. He had never heard of such a place before, and decided that it must be some distance from Southlake.

"Well, how do you like the looks of it?" asked Frank, as the prisoner's gaze wandered around the cave.

"I never saw the place before," returned Sandy. "Where are we?"

"In our camp."

"No, but where is it?"

"Wouldn't we be fools to tell ye?" cried Jack Brian.

"You could never find it from the outside," added Frank. "When we've given you a little taste of what it means to be cooped up here, we'll let you go. But we shall make pretty sure that you can't find your way back."

"I wish you would untie my hands," said Sandy. "This isn't the most pleasant position in the world."

"Don't you do it, Frank," cautioned Jack.

"Tie them in front, then," suggested Sandy. This request was complied with, and Sandy seated himself upon the pile of blankets near the fire.

"What do you fellows want to live this sort of a life for?" he asked.

"We're suited with it," said Frank, and then he and Jack became engrossed in a conversation which they carried on in low tones. After an hour or so Frank arose and approached the prisoner, and led him toward the rear of the cave, where he spread some branches on the sand and bade him lie down. Then he and Jack made their own arrangements for the night. Jack lay across the entrance to the cave, and Frank reclined by the fire with his gun by his side. Sandy watched these preparations with misgivings.

"There isn't going to be any chance for me to escape even if I get my hands free," he thought. "I should be sure to wake Jack if I tried to crawl out, and getting Frank's gun without arousing him is out of the question." Nevertheless the prisoner worked away. Unlike Charlie Norcross, he was unable to break the cords that bound him. He worked his wrists back and forth, chafing them, to be sure, but in the end loosening the cords so that he could slip them off his hands. His captors were both sleeping soundly. The fire had died down to a bed of glowing coals, but Sandy's eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and he did not need its light.

He rose silently and gazed at the two sleeping boys for a moment. Then he moved toward the rear of the cavern. Picking his way carefully among the rocks with which the floor was strewn, so as not to disturb his captors, he reached the end. The apartment was seventy-five feet deep or more, and its average height must have been ten feet. "Now if the opening were only at this end," he thought, groping his way along by the wall. At that moment he stepped upon a flat rock lying in his path. The rock yielded to his weight, and before he could spring aside he felt himself falling. He clutched at the sides of the cavity, but it stayed him only a moment. Then he dropped into the abyss below.

The shock of the unexpected fall stunned him for a moment. When he came to his senses he could see nothing above or around him, but he soon decided that he was in another cave. He had a few matches in his pocket, and one of them he lighted. It cast but a flickering glow about him, but he discovered the cord near by with which his wrists had been bound.

He groped for this cord when the tiny flame expired, and began pulling the strands apart. Then he rose to his feet. He was very lame, and his head

ached, but he considered himself fortunate in not being otherwise injured. He struck another of the precious matches and lit the end of the cord. It flashed into a bright blaze, and the cavern was revealed. The roof was all of twenty feet above him, and from it hung pendent numberless beautiful stalactites, upon which the light danced and flashed, giving the place the appearance of a picture of fairyland.

Sandy started toward the further end of the cave, occasionally swinging the cord about his head to keep it blazing. Soon the cave began to narrow, and he felt the cool night wind blowing in his face. The light went out, but he groped on through the partial darkness until the tunnel contracted so that he could hardly stand erect. Then an opening appeared, through which he saw the sky, now flushed with the light of the coming day.

"Where am I?" he thought, as he reached the outer air.

Above rose Mount Bailey, while before him, now quite plainly visible in the increasing light, lay the fields and woodlands of Southlake. Much to his astonishment, the subterranean passage through which he had escaped was situated upon his own land!

He reached the house at sunrise, and found Charlie Norcross in the kitchen. "Where have you been?" asked Charlie.

Sandy recounted the adventures of the night, and ended by saying: "Just as soon as I get a little sleep, I'm going to Boston to see Mr. Carroll, and tell him where Frank is. I know that he is worried about him."

Sandy warned Charlie not to repeat to anyone his night's adventure, and, after lying down for a couple of hours of needed rest, he started for the city, arriving at Mr. Carroll's office about noon. That gentleman received him cordially.

"Mr. Carroll, I have discovered that your son Frank is still about Southlake, and I know just where he and his chum are staying," began Sandy.

"You do? Where are the young rascals?" inquired Mr. Carroll, considerably excited.

"They are living in a cave on my farm."

"Are you sure they are there now? If I get hold of Frank I'll venture to say he won't run away again. I sent him up there to his Uncle Ezra's, thinking that the old gentleman might have some influence over him. I wish I could go back with you now and see him, but I cannot leave here before the twelfth of the month."

"That is Wednesday."

"Yes. Look for me on one of the afternoon trains. I shall come if possible."

Sandy returned to Tiverton with the expectation that Mr. Carroll would come up himself to see about his son. But on Wednesday he received a letter from him, stating that he found it would be impossible for him to reach Southlake before Saturday night, and requesting Sandy to meet him at the station. So on Saturday afternoon the young farmer drove down to meet the Boston train. As he passed Joel Smith's house that worthy hailed him.

"Be you goin' down ter the store, Sandy?" he inquired.

"I'm going that way."

"Waal, jest hol' on a minute an' give me a lift, will ye?" and Joel hurried out to the carriage.

"How's the ghost getting along at the Benton place?" asked Sandy, with a smile.

"Naow, see here, don't you go ter laffin' at that," said Joel, solemnly. "There's more in't than I reckoned fust along. It r'ally does look as though suthin' or ruther aout o' the common run was hanging about the ol' house. There *is* people in the village that you can't hire ter go a-near it."

"I don't believe," began Sandy, and then he

stopped and gazed long and earnestly at the great square house which had so long been occupied by Ezra Benton, and which was now in sight. "Look there!" he exclaimed.

Joel looked in the direction Sandy pointed. A thin, blue line of smoke was lazily rising from one of the chimneys of the house. It was plainly visible against the background of overcast sky.

"Waal, I swan!" exclaimed Joel.

"Nothing ghostly about that, is there?" inquired Sandy, whipping up his horse. "I never heard of ghosts building fires in houses they haunted. I'm going to look into this."

"I'm with ye," said Joel.

"John Peabody, Mr. Benton's old coachman, has the keys, hasn't he?"

"Yes. He boards daown ter 'Siah's."

Arriving at the hotel, they found John Peabody on the piazza and called him out to the carriage. "John," said Sandy, "there's somebody in the old Benton house, I think. Do you know anything about it?"

"In the Benton house?" cried John, in astonishment.

"Sh! don't speak so loud. Perhaps I'm mistaken, but both Mr. Smith and myself saw smoke

rising from one of the chimneys. Get Briggs and bring the keys of the house."

"Just as you say, Sandy," returned the ex-coachman, "but I think you must be mistaken." He hurried to his room and soon returned with the keys. Then, taking the constable with them, they started for the Benton house. The shutters were all closed and everything looked deserted about the place; but Sandy led the way to the side door. The ex-coachman fitted a key to the lock and opened the door. All was dark in the hall and Peabody hesitated. As for the constable, he very evidently did not fancy the duty imposed upon him of attacking the supernatural occupants of the house.

"There isn't anybody here," said the ex-coachman, still hesitating in the doorway."

"We'll soon see," rejoined Sandy, pushing into the hall. His companions followed him and the door swung to with a loud bang which echoed and re-echoed through the silent dwelling. They all stood a moment with fast-beating hearts listening to the sound as it died away. Then Sandy opened the door at the left and entered the library. Heavy draperies were drawn over each window and the room was shrouded in partial darkness; but at the further end a fire was burning in the open grate.

An armchair was drawn up before the cheerful blaze and the figure of a man reclined among the cushions.

As the door opened the figure moved and, rising from the chair, faced the intruders. The dim light from a single lamp overhead was thrown over the man's features.

"Ezra Benton!" cried Sandy.

With a simultaneous cry of horror the constable and the ex-coachman rushed from the room!

CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK TO LIFE.

For a moment, too, Sandy's unbelief in the supernatural was shaken. As for Joel, he was fairly trembling with fright, but he would not desert his young friend at this juncture.

The figure approached them silently, and both Sandy and Joel retreated toward the door. The two men who had fled from the room frantically fumbled at the hall door, but between the darkness and their own fright they could not open it. Suddenly somebody swooped down upon them, and, seizing both by the collar, dragged them into the library.

"Oh, d—d—don't!" cried the constable. "I hain't done nothing." He was fairly jabbering in his terror, but the ex-coachman struggled furiously. Their captor threw them both from him upon the floor, at the same time shutting the library door. "There!" he exclaimed. "Keep quiet, can't you? What are you fellows doing here?"

"Doctor Woodworth!" cried Sandy, recognizing the speaker.

At the same moment the apparition—if apparition it was—spoke. "Why, it's Sandy McClure, isn't it? Don't you know me, Sandy?" The voice was certainly that of Ezra Benton, and as Sandy grasped the hand stretched out to him, its hearty pressure assured him that he was touching flesh and blood. Joel Smith's jaw dropped, his eyes actually stuck out with amazement, and he backed to the nearest chair and fell nervelessly into it.

"Waal, I swan ter man!" he muttered, breathlessly. "I never 'spected ter go crazy, but I be now fur sure."

"And this is Joel Smith? Don't you know me, old friend?" asked the ghost.

"I'll be darned if I know whether it's Joel Smith 'r not," returned Joel, staring at the hand outstretched to him. Then he suddenly sprang to his feet. "Glory to Jerusa*lem!*" he shouted, executing a war dance around the room. "*Is* this r'ally you, Ezra? Somebody jest wake me up! Why, Ezra, you're buried, ye know ye be. What in tarnation be you a-doin' out'n your grave?"

Sandy and the doctor laughed, and Mr. Benton said: "No, Joel, I've never been buried yet. And

I hope, please God, to live many years. Won't you shake hands with me?"

Joel complied. "I never shook hands with a ghost afore," he said. "This beats all the spiritu'lists I ever heered tell on." By this time the constable and the ex-coachman had recovered their senses enough to know that in some unaccountable manner Mr. Benton had really come to life.

"Is this truly you, Mr. Benton?" cried John Peabody.

"It is, John," returned the magnate of Tiverton. "Wouldn't you like to work for your old employer again?"

"That I would, sir," returned John, heartily.

"Why, Mr. Benton," said Sandy, "I am rather inclined to feel as Mr. Smith does about shaking hands with a ghost."

"But I'm no ghost, I can assure you," responded Mr. Benton.

"Well, I really wish you would explain a few mysteries then. Weren't you drowned? If not, whose body did they find, and whose funeral did I attend? Where have you been the past four months? How——"

"Hold on, hold on!" said Dr. Woodworth. "You must not excite my patient too much."

"But how came you here with him, doctor?" asked Sandy. "I am fairly eaten up with curiosity. You must answer some of my queries."

"First, let me give you another surprise," said Mr. Benton. "Please be seated, all of you."

He stepped to the fireplace and touched a call bell. In a few moments the door opened, and who should present herself to Sandy's astonished gaze but Mrs. Collins, the old housekeeper. "Mrs. Collins! Well, I don't care what you do now, you can't surprise me," cried Sandy.

"Come in, Mrs. Collins," said Mr. Benton. "Our little plot has been discovered."

The housekeeper came into the room smiling. "Well, I'm glad," she said. "That is, if you can stand the excitement, Mr. Ezra. There's so many things needed in the house which we have not been able to get."

"What gave us away?" inquired the doctor. "I should like to know."

"The smoke of your fire," said Sandy. "I saw it rising as Mr. Smith and I were riding in from Southlake."

"I was afraid of that. Mrs. Collins has done all her cooking with oil, but it was getting so far along in the season that I did not dare to allow Mr. Benton to be without a fire."

"How long have you been living here?" asked Sandy.

"Over two weeks now," replied Mr. Benton.

"Two weeks! Well, you have given Tiverton people a scare. The house was reported to be haunted."

"Yes, I know. The doctor told me about it, and I fancy," said Mr. Benton, with a smile, "that he can tell considerable about the ghosts."

"Our friend Charlie Norcross can tell more about it than anyone else," added the doctor. "He carried out that part of the plot."

"Charlie!" cried Sandy. "And did he know about it, too?"

"Yes, indeed, he has been a very valuable assistant," replied the doctor.

"Well," said Sandy, drawing a long breath. "*Won't* Tiverton be surprised! Let's hear all about it."

"You'd better tell them, Mr. Benton," said the doctor, laughing. "Mr. Smith, I see, is rapidly becoming a human interrogation point."

"I will begin the story, but I shall have to call upon you, doctor, and upon my good Mrs. Collins, to finish it for me," responded Mr. Benton.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TALE OF A GHOST.

"I will start at the point when I disappeared from Tiverton," began the old gentleman. "Mr. Briggs told me on the very day I was supposed to have been drowned that he had seen my nephew Frank and the boy Jack Brian over on the north shore of the pond. I was, of course, much worried over my nephew's behavior, and I started off in a row-boat late in the afternoon to see if I could find him. I was unsuccessful in my search, and, as it began to grow dark, I decided to return. When I came to this decision I was seated in my boat under the old maple tree that used to hang, as you will remember, over the pond on the north shore. My lingering in that position was well-nigh fatal. I suppose the water, which had been undermining the roots of the old tree for years, had finally completed its work. Without the least warning, the tree plunged forward across my boat.

"The boat was driven under water, and I re-

ceived a terrible blow on the head. The knowledge of all about me seemed slipping away, and then came a complete blank. It must have been all of a month afterward when I began to recover my senses. I found myself in the care of a man whom I had never seen before. Although the blow I had received had stunned me, the water was probably too shallow to drown me, and I had somehow got ashore and this man found me.

"Although a stranger, he had taken me to a cabin, which he occupied, and cared for me with all the tenderness and thoughtfulness of a woman. He was what you would call a tramp, a thief, and a rascal; but he saved my life. I gathered from what he said—he had a habit of talking aloud—that his name was Ben Stearns——"

"Ben Stearns!" cried Sandy. "Why, he was the man who was with your nephew and Jack Brian."

"It was the same," said Mr. Benton. "His parents used to live in Tiverton, and I remembered him as a boy. But he did not recognize me. When I began to get my bodily strength back Ben would go off and be gone nearly all day, leaving me alone in the cabin. One morning he came and handed me a wallet, saying: 'Look here, Looney' (he

called me 'Looney' for lack of a better name, I suppose), 'Look here, Looney, see what a haul I've made.' He opened the pocketbook and displayed one compartment filled with bank notes. He took some of the money out and then handed me the wallet. 'Now you want to keep this for me,' he said, and went away. I have never seen him since."

"Ezra," said Joel Smith, whose wits had been at work since the gentleman had first spoken of Ben Stearns, "what sort of a looking feller was this Ben Stearns?"

"He was about my height, but stouter built. Did you ever see him around the village?"

"Waal, I dunno abeout seein' him. But there was a feller Jim Richards was a telling me of who bought a jug o' whisky from him an' never showed up again with the jug, although Jim only lent it to him. The feller bought some other provisions, too, 'sides the whisky—beans an' meal and sech like. One day last month, when I was fishin' daown ter the lower eend of the lake—I reckon you remember it, don't you, Sandy?—I hauled up a jug o' whisky out'n the water an' Jim said it was the same jug he sold this fellow. Howsomever, it was right near where they found your body."

"My body!" cried Mr. Benton, in despair.

"*Can't* I make you believe that I am not drowned?"

"Waal, I dunno," said Joel, doggedly. "I hain't never 'tended the same man's fun'ral twice an' I'll be darned if I go to yours ag'in!"

"The body found there must have been that of Ben Stearns," said Sandy.

"That's what I expected," said Dr. Woodworth.

"Yes, that was his end," said Mr. Benton, sadly. "Mrs. Collins told me how she had identified my seal ring on the dead man's finger. Well, I wish he had lived so that I might repay him for his kindness to me. After he left me I began to gain strength in both mind and body quite rapidly. I prowled about the village evenings when I could not be recognized and got hold of some copies of the *Bugle,* and through them and other sources I learned the gist of what had taken place since my disappearance. I did not dare to go back then and take up the duties and responsibilities of business life. My mind was still too weak, for there were times when I felt as though I should lose it altogether. Dr. Woodworth here is better able to explain to you my condition than I am myself, I suppose.

"My brother-in-law was conducting my mill busi-

ness, and I was satisfied on that score. But there was one thing I did need, and that was attendance, for I might die alone in the cabin without anybody being the wiser. I learned that Mrs. Collins had gone to Southlake and I followed her there. How I escaped observation is a mystery, but, as you know, I did. After a day or two about Southlake I learned where Mrs. Collins slept, and one night, after the house was still, I placed a ladder against the roof of the L and climbed up to her window. Now, Mrs. Collins, you can tell your part of it," and Mr. Benton leaned back in his chair, as though wearied with recounting his story.

"I don't know as I can tell it to suit you, Mr. Ezra," said the housekeeper, "but I will try. You know, Sandy, the day we went to the funeral I did not come down to supper. I couldn't eat any, I felt that bad, so I stayed in my own room. I couldn't sleep either, and I sat by the window looking out long after everybody else in the house had gone to bed. Suddenly I saw raised above the roof the top rounds of a ladder, and a few moments later a man came up. I was just going to rouse somebody, thinking the man a burglar; but as I rose from my chair I saw it was Mr. Ezra. I never did believe in ghosts, but I was tempted to then, I

was that scared. But when he spoke to me I knew it was no ghost.

"He told me in a few words what he has told you all today. I wanted him to stay there at Southlake, but he seemed dreadfully excited and nervous, and so, to humor him, I picked up a few things and went with him. I didn't know what you folks would think, but I couldn't leave no word. Mr. Ezra led me to the cabin where he lived, and there we stayed until the doctor found us."

"Now, doctor, your part of the story, please," said Mr. Benton, turning to Dr. Woodworth.

"Well, I suppose I shall have to tell Charlie's part as well as my own," responded the doctor, laughing. "My discovery of the whereabouts of Mr. Benton and Mrs. Collins was purely accidental. I was hunting for some spring water one day over on the west shore of the pond, and I discovered the cabin and its occupants. Being interested professionally in more ways than one," and the doctor smiled knowingly at Mr. Benton, "I took hold of the case at once, and I compliment myself that my patient is in fairly good condition of both mind and body. In fact, his summer of roughing it in the woods had added ten years to his life. Charlie came across the cabin in about the same manner

that I did. He was the one who first proposed scaring the keepers of this house away so that we could have a more comfortable place for Mr. Benton as cold weather approached. In fact, he took the part of the ghost and spent a good portion of the night here at times. Mr. Benton had a key to the cellar door, and by this means we obtained entrance. Charlie has been our general utility man and has rendered most valuable assistance in our little plot, hasn't he, Mr. Benton?"

"Yes, indeed," was the reply. "He has been a great help to us."

"It all sounds like a story book," said Sandy, when the narrative was finished.

"Beats anything *I* ever heered," was Joel's comment.

"And now, gentlemen," said the doctor, "I shall have to take command and order you all away. My patient must rest after this excitement. And also, we ask you to keep this a profound secret until Mr. Benton is strong enough to receive his friends."

The constable and the ex-coachman promised strict secrecy and departed, and Joel and Sandy soon followed them. "There's a storm coming," said Sandy, as he and Joel stood a moment on the steps of the old mansion.

"Line storm," returned Joel. "It's a-comin' butt eend foremost, too." The black, threatening clouds rolled up the overcast sky, and the wind increased in fury every moment. Before they reached the hotel the gale was upon them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIEND.

The storm which had so suddenly burst upon the country-side that September afternoon was long remembered in the annals of the neighborhood, and was fruitful of many discussions on 'Siah Perkins's piazza by the philosophers' convention. While Sandy and Joel Smith were breasting the gale on their way from the Benton house to the hotel, the storm was raging and howling among the crags and bowlders of Mount Bailey.

The rain, which fell in sheets, dashed upon the summit of the mountain and came pouring down the descent to the valley and lake below. Every gully and ravine was a rushing torrent and innumerable cataracts fell over the cliffs with a roar which rose above the tumult of the storm. Upon the side of a cliff facing the pond the wild vines and creepers had clung for years, completely covering the gray rock from sight. But at the first outburst of the storm these vines had been swept away,

revealing a wide, gaping hole in the cliff. A fire had been burning near the mouth of the cavity, but in a moment the rain dashed in and quenched the blaze.

Back in the cavern, out of reach of the storm, lay Frank Carroll, tossing on his bed of pine branches in the delirium of fever. Near him, soothing his troubled moanings, and bringing the cool water for which he called unceasingly, was Jack Brian. It was nearly a week since Frank had been taken ill, and in all that time his companion had hardly slept an hour, so constantly had he attended his friend. Frank had been sheltered from the weather until now, but with the front of their refuge torn away, the damp air swept in and chilled him. Either this or the noise of the elements without called back his mind from its wanderings. "What is it, Jack? What makes it so cold?" he asked, drawing the blankets more tightly about his shoulders.

"It's the storm, Frank. It's gone an' tore down the vines an' put out the fire."

"I wish I was at home, Jack. I'm awful sick, ain't I?" and Frank glanced up at his friend with a frightened face.

"Yes, yer be pretty sick, I'm 'feared. I wish I could get a doctor to ye. I'd go fur one, but I

dassen't leave ye alone. An' the peelers would get us if I showed anyone the way here."

"It don't much matter if they do," said Frank. "I'm going to die—I know I am! I wish I was home."

"If ye think ye can git along a little while alone I'll go over ter Southlake. That's the nearest house. Mebbe they could get a doctor here."

"Oh, I wish you could, Jack."

"I 'spected Sandy McClure would be 'round here with a mob ter dig us out 'fore now. There hain't much use ter hide here any longer."

"I'm frightened, Jack. I don't want to die. I wish I could have a doctor—perhaps I could get well."

"I'll go," and Jack arose.

"Not now, Jack," said Frank, raising himself on his elbow and looking out into the storm and darkness. "You can't find your way in this storm."

"Don't fear," replied Jack. "I'm goin' now. I'll be back as soon as I leave word with them at the farm." A moment later he plunged bravely into the tempest and disappeared.

The gale raged as fiercely about Southlake as it did elsewhere, and at its first approach Charlie Norcross housed the stock and attended to their wants

for the night. Mrs. McClure was in the kitchen, preparing supper, when suddenly the outer door was thrown open and Jack Brian staggered into the room. His hat had blown away and the water ran down his face from off his tangled mat of hair and dripped to the floor from his drenched clothing. He closed the door and leaned his back against it, gasping for breath after his battle with the storm.

"Is McClure here?" he asked, paying no heed to the lady's startled exclamation. "Tell him—send help. Frank's sick up in the cave. He's all alone."

"What is it? Who is sick?"

"Frank Carroll. Send help—doctor if there is one. He's dying!"

"Frank dying!" cried the good woman. "Isn't that terrible! and his father coming up this very night, too."

"Send somebody up there—do! He's too sick to be left alone."

"Oh, dear! None of the men folks are about the house. What shall I do?"

"I'm goin' back," said Jack, opening the door. "Send somebody right off." Before she could detain him, the darkness and storm hid him from sight. The gale seemed to have increased in fury. Blown hither and thither by the wind, too weak to

withstand its power now, Jack plodded on toward the mountain. The thunder muttered and rolled overhead, and the frequent flashes of lightning blinded him.

But he was almost at the cave. He toiled up the steep path and reached the opening in the rock. Suddenly there was a fearful flash, followed by a peal of thunder which seemed to shake the very earth. A ball of fire passed before his vision, there was the sound of rending wood, and the huge tree standing by the cavern's mouth was split from a crotch high above the ground to its very roots.

The shock threw Jack to the earth. The stricken tree tottered a moment, then with a crash fell across his body!

Then there was a lull in the storm.

Oh, the agony he suffered! Pinioned to the rock, every motion increasing his pain tenfold, he still struggled to crawl from under the terrible weight which pressed upon him. At length, with a groan, he lay exhausted.

After Jack left the cave Frank relapsed into a stupor from which he was suddenly aroused by a terrible peal of thunder and the crash of the falling tree which had stood beside the cavern. He raised himself upon his elbow and listened. Surely he

heard a groan. Or was it himself who had groaned? "Jack!" he called. "Jack!"

"I'm here, Frank," came the reply, as faint as his own weak tones.

"Where?"

"Here—at the door. Th' tree's fell on me, an' I can't move."

"Oh, why can't I help you?" cried Frank, struggling to rise.

"Don't bother. It'll be—all over soon," gasped Jack. "I went ter Southlake. They're—they're comin' for you." He was silent a moment, stifling his groans that his friend might not know how he suffered. But Frank sobbed aloud. "Don't cry, Frank. Good by—I'm goin'."

There was a choking, gasping cry and then—silence! Frank fell back upon his rude couch, his frame shaken by a passion of sobs. Jack was dead, and he was alone on the mountain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A REVELATION.

On that eventful Saturday evening the long, crowded train steamed slowly into Tiverton just as the storm seemed to have reached its height. Mr. Henry Carroll struggled through the crowd of wet and excited people on the platform of the little station and hurried to Sandy's carriage, which was waiting for him. The merchant had made preparations for the storm, wearing a waterproof coat and with a gossamer covering drawn over his silk hat. He climbed up to the seat at Sandy's side and they started for Southlake. "Quite a little blow," suggested the merchant, after greetings had been exchanged.

"Yes, sir, worst this season," was the reply, as Sandy bent his head to the blast.

"Perhaps we'd better have waited until it held up a little," said Mr. Carroll, after they had left the village behind them.

"No, I must be home as soon as possible," Sandy

replied. "There's nobody there but my hired man, and if this gale keeps on all the outbuildings may be unroofed."

"Why, where's the professor, and that doctor who is boarding with you?"

"Professor Dwight has gone to New York. The doctor is attending a case in the village," replied Sandy, and he chuckled to himself as he thought who the patient was. The rain, which seemed to descend in veritable sheets, came sweeping across the cornfields, dashing in the faces of the travelers, and at times almost making the horse stagger. Sandy, who was unprotected from the storm save for a great-coat, was quickly wet through, but Mr. Carroll was fortunate in possessing an umbrella as well as his rubber coat. Behind the shelter of the umbrella he was able to converse much more easily than Sandy.

"You'll be soaked, McClure," he said, when Sandy refused the offer of a part of the umbrella.

"I am already," rejoined the boy, with a grim smile. Then more gravely: "I wonder what those boys will do on the mountain in such a storm as this?"

"Oh, they'll get along all right," returned Mr. Carroll, lightly. "You can't spoil bad eggs, and

nothing of this sort will hurt them." Sandy thought this sounded heartless, but he remained silent. As they neared the south pasture a sudden flash of lightning lit up their surroundings. A ball of fire seemed to rest for a moment on the top of the derrick which spanned the mouth of the copper mine, and then flashed downward to the earth. The deafening peal of thunder was followed by a crash of falling timbers, and the next flash revealed the derrick a complete wreck. The horse reared upon his haunches and would have shied into a bowlder by the roadside had not Sandy grasped the reins more firmly and controlled him. The flash had startled Mr. Carroll, too, and in an unguarded moment he turned his umbrella so that the wind got under it. In an instant it was blown from his grasp and went sailing off over the fields.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, much chagrined. "There goes a five dollar umbrella. I bought it only last week."

"Look there, sir," said Sandy, who had quieted his horse, and he pointed to the shed nearest the mouth of the mine. A puff of smoke was rising from one corner. The lightning had set the building on fire. Sandy jumped out of the wagon and led his horse to the fence. "Come on, sir," he

shouted, so that Mr. Carroll could hear him above the noise of the storm. "The building's afire and I don't believe even the watchman is about."

Mr. Carroll sprang to the ground and followed Sandy to the fence. "Do you forget whose place that is?" he said, grasping the boy's arm. "That's Chadwick's."

"What of it?" asked Sandy, slowly, stopping in the occupation of tying the horse.

"Hasn't he cheated you enough without your asking that?" inquired Mr. Carroll, in surprise. "It will serve him right if he does lose the building."

For a moment Sandy hesitated. He untied the hitching strap, and turned as though to climb into the wagon again. Then he flashed a look at Mr. Carroll that made that gentleman wince. "There's no reason why I should be a scoundrel, if he is," he said. He retied the horse and hurried toward the burning shed, followed by the merchant. The smoke was pouring out of a little window near the open shaft of the mine. "It's burning inside," said Sandy. "If it were ouside, the rain would put it out."

He tried the door and found it locked; but, throwing himself against it with all his strength, after one or two attempts, he succeeded in breaking the

lock. The smoke rushed out of the opening and drove them back, but Sandy saw that one end of the interior was all ablaze. The light, dry wood was burning fiercely, and prompt work only could save the buildings from being gutted. A couple of buckets hung beside the door, and two or three half hogsheads were standing near by full to the brim with water. Catching up one of the buckets, Sandy motioned to Mr. Carroll to take the other, and together they rushed from the water butts to the burning building, dashing the water upon the fire until every spark was out.

It was now quite late, and the storm seemed to have moderated to some extent. They hurried on, and soon reached the farmhouse door. Mrs. McClure's first remark as they entered the kitchen was: "Oh, Mr. Carroll! Frank is 'way up on the mountain in this storm, and he's very ill. The boy who brought the message said that he was dying."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Carroll, in dismay.

"Who brought the message?" asked Sandy.

"It was that Jack Brian," returned Mrs. McClure. "He said you'd know where to come."

"Perhaps Frank isn't as bad as Jack thinks," Sandy said, cheerfully. "Anyway, we'll go up and see."

"In this storm?" exclaimed Mrs. McClure.

"Yes. It's holding up, I reckon."

"No, it isn't," said Charlie Norcross, opening the door in time to hear Sandy's last remark. "It's blowing harder than ever."

"Don't go now," said Mrs. McClure.

"What's the matter? Where are you going, Sandy?" asked Charlie.

"Jack Brian has just been here and told mother that Frank is ill up there in the cave, and they want help."

"He begged me to get a doctor there," said Mrs. McClure.

Mr. Carroll seemed to have been stricken dumb by the intelligence. At last he exclaimed: "Somebody must go up there at once! You mustn't wait. I'll give you anything you're a mind to ask if you'll go, McClure. I can't go. I shall get my death if I do. I'm wet through now."

"Don't you intend to try it?" cried Sandy, in amazement.

"I can't. I shall surely get my death in this storm. What would become of my business then?" returned Mr. Carroll, who seemed to be completely unmanned.

Sandy was speechless with surprise at the mer-

chant's reply. "I'll give you a hundred dollars if you will go up there and bring Frank back," Mr. Carroll cried.

"I don't want money for doing it," said Sandy, turning away.

"I'll give *you* a hundred—anything you ask," said Mr. Carroll, turning to Charlie Norcross.

Charlie had been staring at the wet and bedraggled figure of the Boston merchant ever since he had come in. He recoiled as Sandy had at the offer. "I do not want your money," he replied, sternly. "I would not touch it; but *I love my brother enough to go to his rescue!*" Sandy and his mother were fairly astounded at Charlie's words, and for a moment both stared at the young man.

Henry Carroll sprang to his feet and grasped the hired man by the arm. "What do you mean?" he cried. Then: "Is it you, Charles?"

Charlie drew roughly away from him. "Yes, it is I," he said, coldly. Then, turning to the McClures, he added: "You might as well know it. This—this man is my father. My real name is Charles Norcross Carroll. Frank is my half brother."

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Mrs. McClure.

Mr. Carroll had sunk back into his seat by the fire and covered his face with his hands. For once it seemed as though the proud spirit of the man was broken. "Come, Sandy," Charlie said, turning to his friend. "Help me save him. Harness up and go for the doctor and I'll go over to the cave at once."

He drew on his wet overcoat again and both went out into the storm. With Charlie's assistance Sandy harnessed the other horse and drove hurriedly toward the village, while Charlie started for the mountain. The gale was decreasing in violence, but Charlie found it exceedingly hard traveling through the woods. The path was strewn with branches which the wind had torn off, and one or two trees were furrowed down their trunks by the lightning. He carried the barn lantern and found little difficulty in discovering the path to the cave.

A fallen tree lay before the entrance, and, as he climbed over the prostrate trunk, his foot struck against a body. For an instant he thought it might be his brother, and his heart almost stood still at the thought. Then he flashed the lantern upon the rigid, upturned face of Jack Brian. A huge limb lay directly across poor Jack's breast, and the expression on the face and in the wide-open eyes be-

trayed the agony he had endured before merciful Death had come to his relief.

Charlie stepped over the body and held the lantern above his head, so as to illuminate the cave. The pale, flickering light showed the form of his brother stretched upon the rude couch at the back of the cavern. He sprang hastily forward and knelt beside him. "Who is it—Jack?" muttered Frank, starting up.

"No, it is I—Charlie. Don't you know your brother, Frank?"

Frank stared at the face bending over him for a moment, and then fell back upon his couch.

"Charlie's dead," he said, and went on muttering in his delirium. Charlie laid his hand on the boy's forehead.

"He's burning up with fever!" he exclaimed. "I can't let him stay here any longer." He lifted Frank in his arms and wrapped the blankets about him as a protection from the storm. Then, picking up the lantern, he strode out of the cave and down the rocky mountain path. Charlie was a remarkably muscular young fellow, but he was forced to rest with his burden more than once on his way to the farmhouse. Frank lay motionless in his arms, silent save for a pitiful moan now and then.

Soon, however, the fever-stricken boy was placed between Mrs. McClure's warm blankets, and the good lady was administering to his needs as best she knew until the doctor should arrive.

Charlie and his father were left alone in the kitchen for a few moments. Mr. Carroll had divested himself of his wet clothing and was shivering before the fire. The chill and excitement of the evening had evidently been too much for his nerves. "How came you here, Charles?" he asked.

"I've been here since spring," replied his son, gloomily. "Sandy gave me a chance to make a man of myself when I was pretty low down, and I've held to it ever since."

"I'm glad you're doing so well," said the merchant, simply, and then relapsed into silence.

The doctor soon arrived and took charge of Frank. "Perhaps we'll pull him through," he reported, gravely, after making an examination of the case. "But, to tell the truth, it looks very doubtful just now. He has a good constitution—one thing in his favor, to be sure. The excitement and exposure, however, may cause brain fever."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHADWICK IN THE TOILS.

The next morning Dr. Woodworth was more hopeful regarding the sick boy's condition. The day itself seemed to bring a promise of hope, for the sun shone as brightly and the birds sang as sweetly as though a storm had not swept over the country the previous night. Sandy, Charlie, and Joel Smith went over to the mountain early in the morning and brought back Jack Brian's body. In the afternoon it was conveyed to the house of Jack's father, who was a hard-working mechanic living at the other end of the village. Mr. Carroll expressed his intention of paying the funeral expenses.

"That's the most respectable thing I ever knew him to do," said Charlie, when he heard of it.

"Look here, Charlie," said Sandy, placing both hands on his friend's shoulders and giving him a little shake. "I want you to stop that. You know that isn't the way to talk about your father, even if he has wronged you. If you want folks to be char-

itable toward you, you must have some charity for him. It isn't right for you to speak so of him, and you know it."

"Well, he doesn't deserve any respect," returned the young man, a little shamefaced at the rebuke.

"Yes he does. He's your father, and that fact alone should be enough to make you treat him respectfully. He is getting along in years now, and you must excuse his mistakes. He'll have to give up business before long, and I hope you'll step into his place."

"No, sir!" exclaimed Charlie, vehemently. "I'll do nothing of the kind. Uncle Ezra has made me an offer—

"Oh, does he know who you are?"

"Indeed he does. And he's offered me a position in his mill with a chance to step into *his* shoes. That's more to my liking."

"Well," said Sandy, a little sadly, "he offered me a position in the mill office last spring, and I don't know but that I might as well take it. I'm getting a little bit discouraged, to tell the truth. I haven't the interest in the farm that I had when I owned it all."

Charlie grasped Sandy's hand and wrung it heartily, and there was a suspicious moisture in

his eyes, as he said: "You're going to own the whole place again, if nothing happens."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you will find yourself in possession of the south pasture again before long and Chadwick will be in a hole."

"Why, what have you got to do about it?"

"I had considerable to do with your losing it, and maybe I can help you get it back," returned Charlie, and then he positively refused to have anything more to say on the subject.

Frank began to improve slowly, and Mr. Carroll went back to Boston. The professor and Miss Dwight returned to their home, and things about Southlake began to take on their accustomed appearance. Sandy attended Jack Brian's funeral, and was glad to see that Mr. Carroll had done everything that he had promised, besides helping the family in other ways. There was a large attendance at the funeral, for, although Jack had been called one of the worst, if not the very worst, boy in Tiverton, the good people of the little village were quick to pay tribute to the nobleness of character that led him to sacrifice his own life for his friend.

One thing which rather surprised the young

farmer was the lack of life about the copper-mine. It began to be whispered in the village that Silas Chadwick had not found the mine such a paying investment as he thought.

"Next week your case comes up, Sandy," said the doctor, one morning.

"So it does. Well, what good has it done us to wait all this time? I can't prove any better now that I didn't steal the pocketbook than I could three months ago."

"Can't you?" returned the doctor, with a smile. "Let us wait and see. If I was as sure of bringing Frank Carroll out of his illness as I am of clearing you I should be perfectly happy."

"He's thought of some way to clear me, I do believe!" muttered Sandy, as the doctor turned away, "and I'll bet a cent Charlie knows about it, too." And he began to feel more light-hearted than he had felt for months.

On the morning of Sandy's trial the interest felt by his fellow-townsmen was plainly shown by the crowd of anxious faces which filled the courtroom. Hardly a man present but had heard from Joel Smith a full account of the manner in which Silas Chadwick had cheated Sandy, and many were the black looks directed toward Silas and his satellite

Snell as they came into the room. Silas paid no attention to these ill-natured glances, but smiled maliciously at Sandy, who sat near the rail before the judge's desk. His investment had paid him but little thus far, but he would have the satisfaction of making Sandy feel his hatred.

The case was opened, and Silas was first sworn. He repeated the circumstances under which he had left the coat hanging in the shed over night, and brought forward one or two unwilling witnesses from among his workmen to prove that they had seen the wallet and its contents on the day previous to the robbery. It was plainly evident that the men's sympathies were with Sandy, but they were obliged to admit the truth of Chadwick's statements.

When the state's attorney had presented this testimony, Dr. Woodworth, acting for Sandy, was given an opportunity to put forward evidence in rebuttal.

"I have just one witness," said the doctor, with a peculiar smile. "He will be here in a moment." The doctor stepped to the door and waved his handkerchief to some person outside. The judge and the spectators were mystified, and His Honor was about to ask the meaning of the action, when there

was a sound of carriage wheels, and a phaeton drew up to the door, driven by Charlie Norcross. An elderly gentleman alighted and entered the court room. The spectators stared in amazement, if not in fright.

"Ezra Benton!" burst from at least a dozen pairs of lips.

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed the judge, starting from his seat.

"Aye, it's Ezra Benton," said the old man, turning toward his excited friends and neighbors, who crowded about him. "It's Ezra Benton himself, and none other." Then such a tumult as there was for a few moments in that courtroom! The justice, even, threw aside the dignity of his office and seized Mr. Benton's hand. At length order was restored, and the mill-owner took the stand as a witness for the defense.

He told the story of his absence from home as it has already been repeated in a foregoing chapter; but when he reached the part where Ben Stearns gave him the pocketbook to keep, Dr. Woodworth held out the wallet.

"That's mine!" exclaimed Silas, snatching the wallet from the doctor's hand.

"Your honor and gentlemen of the jury!" cried

the doctor, his voice ringing out above the exclamations of surprise which arose from the spectators, "you hear him claim that wallet as his property. Here is a paper which was discovered in one of the compartments of that wallet," and the doctor held up a folded document.

"What is it? Give it to me!" yelled Chadwick, springing toward the doctor.

But the doctor pushed him back. "Not just yet, sir," he said, coolly. "You asked me what it was. I will tell you. It is a letter forged in Henry F. Carroll's hand!"

This declaration fell like a thunderbolt upon the rogues. Both Chadwick and Snell realized that the game was up, and the same thought filled their minds at once. They sprang toward the door to escape, but two burly officers barred the way. The doctor had taken the precaution to have the city police present to take the men in charge.

"Bracelets, Tom!" said one of the officers, curtly, as Silas struggled desperately to escape. His companion drew out two pairs of handcuffs, and a moment later both Snell and Silas were securely ironed.

The clerk had been loudly rapping for order, but His Honor evidently had had some inkling of the

denouement, for he very calmly dismissed the case against Sandy as soon as he could make himself heard. Then he added, with some hesitation: "But these two fellows——"

"Are wanted in Boston, your Honor," put in Dr. Woodworth, quietly.

"Very well, this case is now dismissed," said the judge. "Mr. McClure, you are entirely free, and I wish to congratulate you on your fortunate possession of so good a counsel. You should practice law instead of medicine, doctor."

The doctor smiled quietly, and drew Sandy out of the crowd. Mr. Benton had already escaped from the room, and was being driven back to his home by Charlie. Down the street, bound in the same direction, were the two officers, with Snell and Chadwick, followed by an excited crowd. "Come on, McClure," said the doctor, drawing the arm of the bewildered youth through his own. "This thing isn't over yet, and we want to see it out."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CLEARING UP OF VARIOUS MATTERS.

As Dr. Woodworth and Sandy neared the Benton house the mansion seemed to have taken on a decidedly wide-awake appearance. The shutters were unclosed, the gate was wide open, and a horse and phaeton stood at the door. The doctor ushered Sandy into the parlor, where were gathered Mr. Benton and his brother-in-law, Mr. Carroll, Charlie, the professor, the two policemen and their prisoners.

"What have you brought me here for?" cried Chadwick, who was fuming with rage.

"To have a final settlement," returned the doctor. "We have you fast this time, you villain, and it's going hard with you."

Chadwick profanely told him to go ahead and do his worst. But Snell remained silent, studying the features of each one with his little, snaky eyes.

"We want to show you that the game is entirely lost," said the doctor. "In the pocketbook which

you identified so quickly this morning, Mr. Chadwick, you will find the one hundred and fifty dollars you claim to have lost. Mr. Benton used some of the money, but it is all refunded to you. Now, I have some papers here," and the doctor drew a small package from his pocket, "which, undoubtedly, you would like to get hold of. Here's the forged letter, the work of Mr. Snell. Also I have here a page torn from Mr. Carroll's letter book, and, lastly, here is the deed of the south pasture from Mrs. McClure and Sandy to Silas Chadwick."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" growled Silas.

"Oh, don't get in a hurry, and I'll tell you. There are two cases against you, Chadwick—larceny and forgery. Nice prospect, isn't it? And you, too, Snell. How will ten years or so suit *you?*"

"That fellow there has as much to do with it as we have," said Chadwick, pointing with his manacled hands toward Charlie Carroll.

"Indeed?" said the doctor, with a smile. "How is that, Charlie?"

"I don't know but that I have *more* to do with this whole affair than they have," said the young man, gravely, "for had it not been for me, Chadwick would never have heard of Southlake Farm."

"Didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed Chadwick.

"I am ashamed to repeat the story before you all," said Charlie, paying no attention to Chadwick's words. "And I hate to spoil your good opinion of me, Sandy, but I will tell you all about it. When we searched for the hidden treasure in the south pasture I kept a bit of the rock which was chipped off the ledge. When I was at school I was somewhat interested in geology, and I thought the piece of rock looked like copper carbonate. I believed at first I was mistaken, for copper had never been mined in New England to my knowledge, except in the State of Maine. I did not want to give Sandy any false hopes, and before I said anything about it I wished to consult an assayer.

"For this purpose I went away for a few days, and the first man I met in Boston whom I knew was Silas Chadwick. Before I—I left home I was friendly with Chadwick, and after I got low down I drove some for him on the eastern tracks. He seemed wonderfully glad to see me, and unguardedly I told him of the find. Then he tempted me, and—well, I have no excuses to offer for my conduct in wronging Sandy and his mother, who had been so kind to me. It is enough to say that I agreed to his proposal after some urging and after

having foolishly drunk enough with him to warp my moral sense.

"His plan was to purchase the south pasture from Sandy, and he promised me one-third of the earnings from the mine. I was sorry the moment after I entered into the compact, and I can't tell you how glad I was when Sandy refused to sell. But Chadwick was determined to get possession of the pasture, and I believed, as did Sandy, that he had purchased the mortgage. I confided my part in the transaction to Miss Dwight, and we were busily concocting some plan by which to straighten out the tangle, when Uncle Ezra and the stolen wallet both came to light." Charlie hesitated a moment before continuing. "I—I—well, Sandy, I feel as though I had made you all this trouble, and I can hardly expect that you will wholly forgive me; but—I hope you won't think too badly of me."

"Charlie," said Sandy, stepping forward and placing his hand in that of the young man, "it was not long ago that I told you to have charity toward —well, toward some people, and I shouldn't be much of a preacher if I did not practice as well. I can forgive you with all my heart, and I know that my mother will also. Whatever trouble I may have been caused through your wrong-doing I forgive."

"Said like a man!" exclaimed Ezra Benton. "I'm proud of both you boys. I don't know which this has been hardest on, but you've both behaved nobly."

"Don't say that, uncle," returned Charlie, "for I shall never forgive myself for the contemptible part I played in the affair."

"Come, now," cried Dr. Woodworth, "you've had your say, now I've just one more little matter to settle with Chadwick here." He whispered something in Sandy's ear, who nodded, and the doctor continued: "I'll make you an offer, Mr. Chadwick. Mr. Carroll agrees not to push this case if you will deed over to Sandy all your right and title to the south pasture."

Silas, who had been listening to the foregoing conversation, brightened perceptibly at this offer. He eagerly jumped at this chance to save himself from the penitentiary, and the deed was quickly made out.

"'All's well that ends well,'" quoted the doctor, as the two rogues departed in company with the officers. "Chadwick's made about two thousand dollars out of this and will get off with but slight punishment for his evil deeds—more's the pity!—and so he's happy. Sandy's got his land back and has

received seven hundred and fifty dollars for its use, so he ought to be pleased. Mr. Benton has come back to life again, which ought to please him as it does everybody else. My friend Charlie has got out of a very uncomfortable scrape and he's happy. Mr. Carroll is certainly happy, as he has recovered both his sons. And the professor and I—well, are like the fathers in the sensational drama, who always end by saying, 'Bless you, my children, bless you!'"

* * * * *

One summer afternoon I boarded the train at a certain railway junction in central Massachusetts.

"I want to go to Tiverton," I said to the conductor when he came along, handing over my mileage book.

"Tiverton? Oh, you mean Southlake," he said. "It's got a new name now."

I found when I alighted that the village not only had a new name, but was changed in many other ways. It had a new station, too, and, drawn up beside the long platform, were two wide-seated wagons. I followed the crowd of pleasure-seekers who climbed into the vehicles, and found room on the seat of one with the driver. He was a tall, loose-

jointed individual with an expansive and very good-natured smile, and I ventured to enter into conversation with him.

"Things have changed some since I was here last," I remarked.

"When might that be?"

"About six years ago."

"Waal, yes, things hev changed some since then fur a fact. We've got two 'r three purty smart, wide-awake young men here an' they've just boomed the ol' place so 't she don't know herself."

"Who are they?" I inquired.

"Who air they? Waal, here comes one of 'em naow," and he indicated with his whip a carriage that was rapidly approaching. I caught a fleeting glimpse of a dignified and martial looking old gentleman, who was sitting in the carriage beside a pleasant-featured man of thirty, who was firmly holding in the spirited horse.

"Is that Mr. Benton?" I cried.

"That's Ezra Benton, sure's you live," returned the driver. "An' that boy is Charlie Norcross—or leastways that's what they useter call him. He's Charlie Carroll naow. He's his Uncle Ezra's right-hand man, an' has done wonders for the village. He's built a house daown in the village near the old

Benton place and married a New York gal—a Miss Dwight. They'd known each other for years—useter go to the same school, an' all that."

"He had a brother, didn't he?"

"Yes, an' a likely boy he is, too. *He's* got an interest in the hotel up here."

"Is that the hotel?" I asked, as a magnificent gray stone building loomed up in sight.

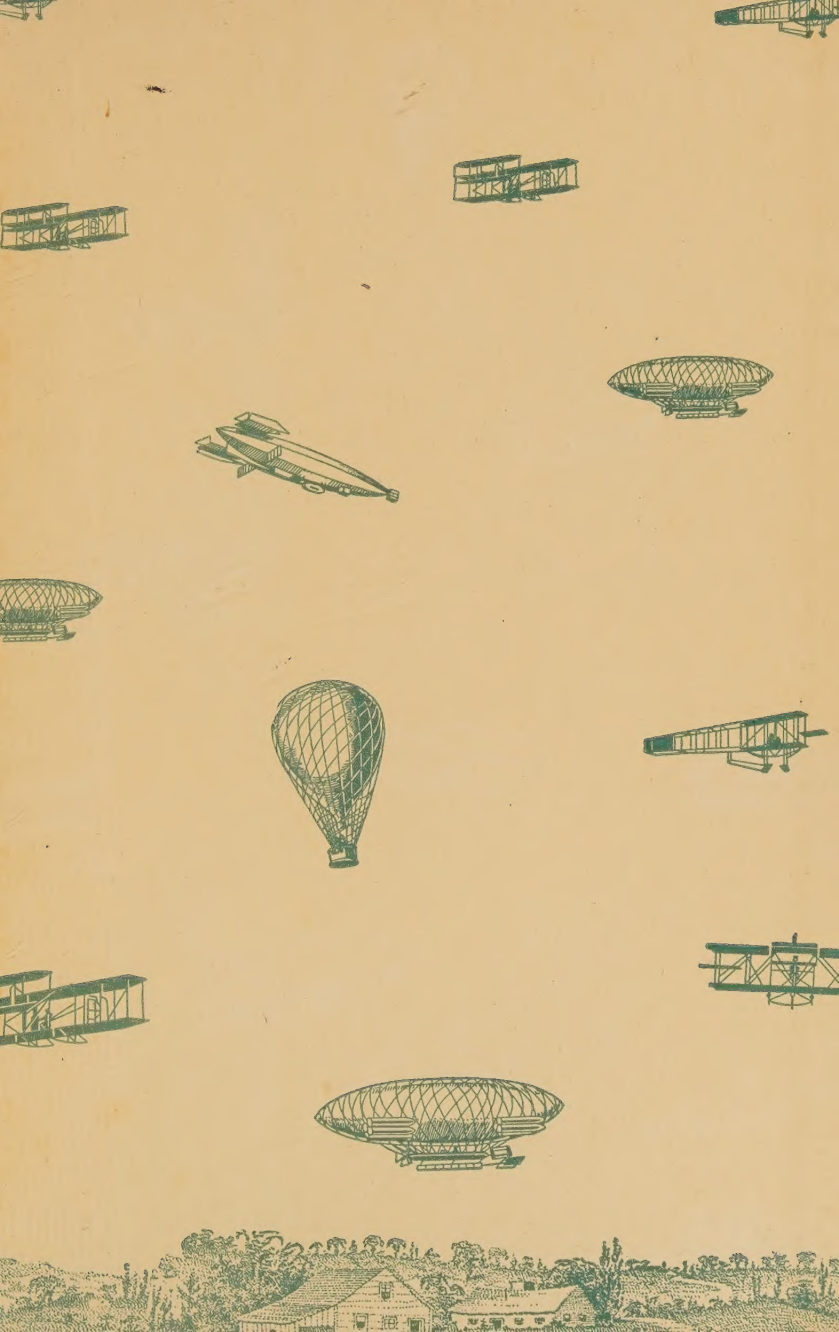
"Yes, sir, that is. Ain't it a whopper? That belongs to Frank Carroll and Sandy McClure, an' I tell ye them boys air smart! They're building drives all over Southlake Farm and this one we're on they had laid out 'way round the shore of the pond ter the mountain over yander. Then they found a cave up there in the mountain an' they've got it fixed up with 'lectric lights so that it's jest the purtiest sight *you* ever see. Folks come from all over the state ter look at that alone. The hotel hain't been built but one season but you'll be lucky if you git a room, let me tell ye, they're so crowded."

"So Frank Carroll has gone into business with Sandy McClure, eh?"

"Yes. Frank's father died abeout four year ago—bankrupt they called it. So Frank an' Sandy kind o' pooled their 'arnin's an' with some help

from Dr. Woodworth, an old friend of theirn, they started in the hotel business."

"But what ever became of the treasure of Southlake Farm?" I asked.

"Oh, you mean the copper-mine? Waal, sir," and the driver laid his finger across the palm of his hand to emphasize his remarks, "that air Sandy McClure is a 'tarnal funny feller an' no mistake. He tore down the buildings on the paster, carted away the machinery an' filled up the shaf'. He declared ter me that he never wanted to hear nothin' more about buried treasures an' sech like; an' although two or three parties hev offered him what *I* call mighty good chances ter open up the ol' mine, as sure's my name's Joel Smith, he won't let 'em!"

THE END.